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**A Critical Exploration of the Influences of Class, Gender and Ethnicity  
on Student Engagement with Graduate Employment Opportunities.**

**Ruth Brooks**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Huddersfield**

**March 2019**

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## **Acknowledgements**

Undertaking a PhD part-time is a long journey, and one I could not have completed without my supervision team. I would like to thank Dr Tray Yeadon-Lee for her support and guidance over the six years I have been working on this study. Her attention to detail and encouragement has been outstanding. I would also like to thank Dr Santokh Gill as co-supervisor for his contributions to the development of my thesis.

My family has also played an important role in my research by allowing me the time and space to study. They have listened to my ideas and helped me to talk through challenges along the way. I would therefore like to thank my husband Andre, and my two daughters, Hannah and Bethany. I would also like to thank my parents, Ann and Robert Dyson, who encouraged the start of my academic journey in the 1980's. Finally, I would like to dedicate my thesis to my late father, Robert Dyson, who would have been proud of my achievements.

## **Abstract**

From an elite system for the privileged few in the 1960's, the university sector has grown to a mass higher education system with approximately half of 18-30 year olds now attending university. With government policy viewing a degree as the route to skilled employment, and a competitive labour market due to the higher number of graduates, emphasis has increasingly been placed on employment outcomes upon graduation. Growth in the sector also means that many students are from non-traditional backgrounds where there is no family tradition of attending university which can make it difficult to negotiate the transition from education to employment.

The aim of this thesis is to critically explore the influences of class, gender and ethnicity on student engagement with graduate employment opportunities. Adopting a longitudinal approach, students from fourteen different subject areas with a range of personal background circumstances were interviewed during their final year of study and one year after graduation. Drawing on this qualitative data a thematic analysis of students' behaviour and attitudes was completed using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field.

The findings from this study indicate engagement with the graduate labour market is complex and nuanced with class, gender and ethnicity intersecting to influence outcomes. The findings identified three groups of behaviour based on outcomes. The first group decided to postpone engagement with the graduate labour market until after they had finished their degree. The second group engaged with employment opportunities, but were unable to secure a graduate-level job. The third group also engaged with the graduate labour market securing employment that required a degree. Key factors that contributed towards gaining a graduate job were students completing work experience as part of their degree and moving away from home to live at university. While universities have a role to play in developing employability skills amongst undergraduate students, consideration of wider background factors should be taken into consideration as graduate employment is not equally accessible to all upon completion of their degree.

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## **Glossary of Abbreviations**

BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
DLHE	Destination of Leavers in Higher Education
EMA	Educational Maintenance Allowance
FTSE	Financial Times Stock Exchange
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council in England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONS	Office for National Statistics
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SOC	Standard Occupational Classification
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

# Chapter One – Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the changing face of higher education in order to set the study into context. Since the 1960's the university sector has expanded significantly with approximately half of young people now obtaining a degree (Department for Education, 2017a). In the next section I will discuss how this growth has been achieved, through a combination of government policy and changing social attitudes, with all who could benefit from a higher-level qualification being encouraged to attend (Robbins, 1963). I will also discuss how the growth has led to the introduction of students paying their own fees with a result being that the field has become commercialised and competitive. Having established the background, this chapter will then continue with the rationale for my choice of topic before presenting the aim of my study along with the research questions used to meet this aim. I will then conclude the chapter with an overview of the structure of my thesis explaining the purpose of each chapter.

## 1.2 The Changing Face of Higher Education

In the early 1960's only 5% of the UK population attended university, a rate considered by McMillan's Conservative Government of the time to be too low for a developed country (Wyness, 2010). Concerned that this would hinder future economic growth, they commissioned the highly influential Robbins Report on Higher Education (1963) which recommended widening access so that all who could potentially benefit from a university education should be able to attend. The Robbins Report identified four key objectives for the university sector: to teach skills; to develop cultivated men and women; support citizenship and undertake research in conjunction with teaching. Believing that able young people were being denied opportunities for learning and progression through their inability to access higher education, the report recommended immediate expansion in the number of university places available.

At the time the Robbins Report (1963) was published, there were approximately 200,000 undergraduates in the UK, with the university system being viewed as elitist and for the privileged few (Burnes, Wend & By, 2013). Analysing longitudinal data,



Edwards (1982) traces the rise in higher education participation back slightly earlier to 1956, positing that attending university by this point was seen as a necessary prerequisite to obtain professional and managerial roles that could have previously been obtained through a technical education. Therefore changing attitudes, in conjunction with expansion in places, led to the number of students attending university steadily increasing with participation rates reaching 15% during the 1980's, moving the system from elite to mass education (Anderson, 2010).

Significant policy reform to promote further expansion in the higher education sector was outlined in Major's 1990-1992 Conservative Government White Paper, Higher Education: A New Framework (Department for Education and Science, 1991). With an aim of one in three young people participating in higher education by the year 2000, the policy committed to continue public funding while also removing the binary system that differentiated the academic-based higher education provided in universities with the vocational-based courses traditionally delivered by polytechnics. Therefore, from 1992 onwards polytechnics became universities within a single system of funding and regulation. To support this growth, and engage students from a wider range of backgrounds, initiatives such as Aimhigher and the Excellence Challenge programme were introduced under Blair's 1997-2001 Labour Government (HEFCE, 2009). Student numbers continued to rise, reaching 1.4 million undergraduates in 2012 (HESA, 2013), representing a 49% overall participation rate (BIS, 2014a). To fund the expansion tuition fees were first introduced in the Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998), with the level gradually rising until the Browne Report (2010), believing that those who benefit from the education should pay the cost, recommended students pay full fees of initially £9,000 per annum from 2012 onwards. Consequently, 2013 saw a 6% decrease in new entrants, but student numbers have since recovered to again reach a 49% participation rate in 2015/16 for English domiciled 17-30 year olds (Department for Education, 2017a). The sector continues to approach, but not yet quite meet, the 50% level at which the system would progress from mass to universal higher education (Palfreyman, 2012).

A key aim of the growth is to widen participation and improve employment opportunities through developing high-level skills amongst students from disadvantaged backgrounds where there is no family tradition of attending university (HEFCE, 2014). As children from disadvantaged families are less likely to continue

their education after compulsory schooling finishes at 16, the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was introduced in 1999 (Fletcher, 2000). Providing 16-19 year olds from low-income families with a weekly sum of money to fund travel and expenses at college, its aim was to increase participation rates in further education with the hope that learners would then continue onto university. With participation rates in further education rising to 96%, Cameron's 2010-2015 Coalition Government abolished the EMA in England in 2012 in favour of a bursary scheme targeting the neediest families (Department for Education, 2011). The EMA still continues to be paid in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Similarly to the Robbins Report (1963), HEFCE (2014) advocate that anyone with the potential to benefit from higher education should be able to attend regardless of their personal circumstances. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2014) suggest widening participation initiatives have had limited success as participation rates by social classes 4,5,6 and 7 have only risen from 25.1% in 1998/99 to 32.3% of all entrants by 2012/13. More recent data from HESA (2018a) again supports the view of limited success of widening participation initiatives. In 2016/17 only 11.4% of students came from low participation in higher education neighbourhoods representing a marginal increase from 10.9% when the new fee regime was introduced. Taking account of improvements on the elitist middle class participation of 1963, Blanden and Machin's (2013) analysis found that higher education expansion has disproportionately advantaged students from wealthier families thus reinforcing inequality. Despite the small unexpected increase in undergraduates entering university since the 2012 fee increase, the Independent Commission on Fees (2014) reported those living in disadvantaged areas are still three times less likely to attend than someone living in an advantaged area.

In 1963 higher education was male dominated with approximately a quarter of undergraduates being female (Gibney, 2013); embracing the opportunities offered through expansion, female participation in higher education has significantly increased. The number of female undergraduates surpassed males for the first time in 1996 (Dyhouse, 2007) and currently females represent 57% of the undergraduate population (HESA, 2018b). Participation based on ethnicity was also low in the 1960's, but as this was a time of high immigration into the UK it is difficult to compare participation rates to class and gender as they formed a small percentage of the

population. Tomlinson (1997) however, posits that ethnic minority parents view education as a way of offering their children equal opportunities for success. Ethnic minorities represented 25% of the 2016/17 university cohort (HESA, 2018b) in comparison to forming 14% of the UK population in the 2011 census (ONS, 2012). Expansion in the sector has led to an increasingly diverse student body that is more representative of the British population.

The number of people attending university in the UK has clearly risen with the sector generating a direct and indirect impact of £95 billion to the UK economy (Universities UK, 2014). Expansion has led to many challenges with the most significant being how to fund the increased numbers of students. While data from the Department for Education (2017a) indicates that rising fees have not had an impact on student numbers there are early indications, though, that students' attitudes and expectations are changing with university being seen more instrumentally as an investment for a successful career (Tomlinson, 2008).

Many believe these changes have caused the sector to become marketised and increasingly commercial with universities vying for students based on factors such as university rankings and reputation (Brown with Carasso, 2013; Locke, 2014; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009). Cribb and Gerwitz (2013) posit that these changes could challenge the distinctive identity of universities, potentially leading them to losing their social role and becoming hollow institutions unless they focus on the value of knowledge and maintain a critically questioning culture.

The 2010-2015 Coalition Government drove marketisation further forward with policies such as publically available standardised data to help applicants select courses and institutions (BIS, 2011) and no limit on the number of students from 2015 allowing universities to recruit as many students as they wish (Osborne, 2013). A more recent policy by May's Conservative Government, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (Department for Education, 2017b), aims to reward and raise the profile of excellent teaching in order to help students make informed choices regarding their study while simultaneously meeting the needs of business. Taking into account metrics on student satisfaction, continuation and employment outcomes, institutions are rated as gold, silver or bronze which, despite policy claims of not being the intention, could be perceived as a ranking system. In light of these changes it is

expected the UK university sector will continue down the route of commercialisation, placing question marks on the role of higher education. This will be considered further in my Literature Review in Chapter Two. I will now present my rationale for choosing my thesis topic.

### 1.3 Rationale

As a beneficiary of the Robbins' (1963) principle, higher education has had a profound and long-reaching impact on my own life. I attended university in the 1980's when the sector was beginning to grow (Anderson, 2010). During my degree I worked with the university careers service and, as a consequence of their support, I quickly secured a graduate-level job. I had to progress through an application process that is still similar today with multiple-stages from application through to assessment centres and interviews (Targetjobs, n.d.a) using careers advice on how to approach each step. O'Leary (2017) comments that the transition from education to work was still smooth at the time of my graduation as the number of graduate jobs available had increased therefore maintaining a relative level of competition. The continued growth to 49% of 17-30 year olds in England now taking a degree (Department for Education, 2017a) has led to the current graduate labour market being highly competitive (CBI, 2014) with many students falling short of their employment aspirations (Porter, 2014).

My interest in the transition from education to employment, and engagement with the graduate labour market, was founded from two perspectives. Firstly, I wanted to gain an understanding of my own personal experiences of attending university and the impact of higher education on my own life opportunities. I have provided a full reflexive account of my personal background and life experiences in relation to my thesis in Appendix A. My second reason developed from my role in the sector as a course leader for an undergraduate degree. When preparing information for the annual Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey (BIS, 2011) I was struck by the difference in employment outcomes of students who had all studied for the same degree. I also began to appreciate that while employment, both graduate and non-graduate level, was the most common path after graduation, it was not the only one and employment measures provided a narrow perspective on the purpose of higher education. As a result of this data I began to consider that since the students were

awarded the same qualification, albeit with different grades, what other factors were potentially influencing their actions upon completing their studies and employment outcomes.

As a course leader I therefore wanted to be able to better support my students in achieving their desired outcomes upon graduation. After reading Reay, David and Ball's (2005) book 'Degrees of Choice' my topic was decided. Reay et al. (2005) use Bourdieu (1977, 1984) to provide a detailed account of how the growth in the higher education sector, from an elite to a mass system, has led to divisions in experience based on class and race while gender inequalities have been reduced. For my thesis I decided to use Bourdieu's concepts to analyse experiences based on class, gender and ethnicity, but upon leaving rather than entering university. Negotiating the transition from the field of education to the field of work is challenging as the graduate labour market is competitive (CBI. 2014). The transition also requires a reconstruction of personal identity as a graduate rather than a student (Tomlinson, 2017). To understand the process of transition and the reasons for differing employment outcomes my study therefore focuses on student engagement with the graduate labour market as outlined in my aim and research questions in the next section.

#### 1.4 Aim of my Research

The aim of my thesis is to critically explore the influences of class, gender and ethnicity upon student engagement with the graduate labour market and their early career experiences. The research is longitudinal focusing on students during their final year of study and their first year after graduation. My research is qualitative, gathering data on students' experience through in-depth interviews and analysing the influence of their personal backgrounds upon their level of engagement and employment outcomes.

To meet the aim of my thesis my main research question is:

- How do the personal background factors of class, gender and ethnicity influence student engagement with graduate employment opportunities during their final year of study and the year following graduation?

To address the main question the following sub-questions will be used:

- What activities did respondents undertake in relation to securing employment?
- What holdings of capital did the respondents possess in relation to the graduate labour market?
- What aspirations did respondents have for their future?
- What barriers did respondents face when accessing the graduate labour market?

Class, gender and ethnicity will be considered within each of these questions to analyse the influence of these background factors upon engagement with the graduate labour market. In the next section I will provide an overview of my thesis to indicate how it is organised to achieve the aim of my research.

### 1.5 Overview of the Thesis

To meet the research aim my thesis has been organised into eight chapters. Due to the number of concepts being used within my thesis, I decided to dedicate two chapters to my literature review. I also felt that from the title of my thesis, 'A Critical Exploration of the Influences of Class, Gender and Ethnicity on Student Engagement with Graduate Employment Opportunities' that there were two distinct aspects that required discussion within the literature to set my study into context and later allow me to analyse my data within a theoretical framework. I therefore focused on the influencing factors of class, gender and ethnicity in Chapter Two and then the graduate labour market and employability in Chapter Three. More specifically, Chapter Two provides the background theory and knowledge on my chosen subject by firstly focusing on the higher education sector and its role in social mobility. I then discuss the literature relating to Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of capital, field and habitus to provide a conceptual framework for my analysis. Within this chapter I also discuss inequality in the fields of education and employment based on class, gender and ethnicity, as well as introducing the concept of intersectionality, to be able to set my findings against other research on the topic. My second literature chapter is Chapter Three which focuses on the concept of employability as a key strategy within higher education. I firstly define the concept before critiquing models of employability. The chapter then focuses on the field of graduate labour where I explain the recruitment

processes organisations use to allow entry to the field. In the last part of the chapter I review the concept of employability in relation to class, gender and ethnicity.

In Chapter Four I address the methodological issues of the research and consider my philosophical position within the study relating it to Bourdieu's epistemological approach of structural constructivism (Fowler, 1997). I then justify my chosen research method of qualitative interviews taking into consideration my design and practice as well as the ethical issues involved in my study. Chapter Four then focuses on my data analysis techniques including how I operationalised Bourdieu's (1977) concepts within my research. Within my thesis I have dedicated Chapters Five to Seven to presenting and discussing my findings. Each data analysis chapter is based on a conceptual group within my study with respondents being allocated according to their level of engagement with the field of graduate labour and their employment outcomes. Within each data analysis chapter I consider the influence of class, gender and ethnicity upon their experiences during their final year and the year after graduation in negotiating the transition from the field of higher education into work. I finally complete my thesis in Chapter Eight with a summary of my conclusions, my recommendations based on my findings as well as my contribution to knowledge from this study. I also discuss further research opportunities before finishing with my final concluding comments on my research. I will now commence my literature review by discussing the field of higher education and inequalities based on class, gender and ethnicity.

## **Chapter Two – The Higher Education Sector and Inequalities based on Class, Gender and Ethnicity**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Over the last 60 years the university sector in the UK has experienced significant growth with higher-level qualifications being considered an important factor in improving social mobility. Inequality, in both education and employment, based on class, gender and ethnicity continues to be an issue, though, with outcomes being influenced by personal circumstances and access to opportunities. The aim of this chapter is to provide background context on the role of higher education before conceptualising class, gender and ethnicity as individual factors as well as in combination through intersectionality. This thesis adopts an analytical framework based on the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984) and his approach to inequality founded on the triadic concepts of capital, field and habitus. These concepts will be critiqued before being discussed in relation to class, gender and ethnicity.

### **2.2 The Role of Higher Education**

Universities in the UK were originally established under Newman's principles dating back to 1852 in which he envisaged them as places of learning to bring together minds for inquiry to push forward the boundaries of knowledge (Boulton & Lucas, 2008). The recent growth in student numbers has challenged this approach with debates regarding the current role of higher education in society. Concerns have been expressed that the university sector is becoming increasingly utilitarian, focusing on training students for the job market rather than pursuing the previously more liberal approach to education of cultivating the mind and broadening knowledge (Weber, 2014).

With the rise in tuition fees, a competitive graduate job market and calls from industry for highly skilled graduates (CBI, 2014), the view that university is the route to good employment is becoming increasingly popular. According to Burns (cited in Swain, 2011) students themselves consider higher education to be a personal investment in their future and therefore expect one of the outcomes to be a better job and salary than if they had not attended university. Scott (2009), Singh (2011) and van der Molen



(1996) all take a functional approach to higher education, positing that it is essential for economic and social development while Dearing (1997) in his review of the sector, advocated further widening participation as an educated population can access higher-level jobs for personal gain as well as contributing to an advanced global economy. In addition, these jobs are also associated with enhanced personal benefits such as job satisfaction, creativity and better financial rewards (International Labour Office, 2011) so should lead to an enriched working experience.

Boulton and Lucas (2008) are concerned that European education policy has constrained universities forcing them to focus on short-term societal demands for economic returns rather than allowing them to be creative and free-thinking institutions that generate knowledge to influence the future. The proliferation of league tables, often interpreted as a proxy for quality, has also impacted on the role of academics with increased pressure to perform against a specific set of targets that take a marketised perspective of higher education (Mok & Nelson, 2013). This narrowing view on the role of higher education in terms of employment and market pressures is contested by Lawson (2012) who argues that universities are places for learning in their own right. The role of academics is to challenge current thinking rather than be just a training ground for future managers (Piercy, 2011). Collini (2012) supports this approach expressing concerns that the focus on economic benefits overlooks the importance of developing intellectual capabilities, critical analysis and clear thinking amongst undergraduates.

Graham (2005), debating the value of universities, differentiates between education and training associating the latter with the increasing number of professional and vocational courses that are delivered in the higher education sector. Within a professional discipline such as medicine, law or teacher training an element of professional preparation would be expected, but the approach should not be so pragmatic that it fails to develop academic enquiry and a desire for learning among students (Furlong, 2013b). Tymon (2013) actually questions whether universities are the most appropriate environment to develop the skills and attributes necessary for the workplace as they are difficult experiences to replicate outside actual business. Rather than just viewing higher education in relation to improving employment prospects, McArthur (2011) posits that university should be seen as a rewarding and enriching experience in itself with participation leading to personal development and

involvement in activities that benefit society. Education and learning should therefore remain at the heart of the university system. Graduates who have been educated as critical thinkers with an enquiring mind will be able to challenge, question and generate new thinking that is beneficial to the workplace as well as society rather than simply possessing the ability to replicate the higher level skills they have been taught.

### 2.2.1 The Government Approach to Higher Education

Considering the academic argument that universities are sites of learning, successive governments from the 1960's onwards have taken an economic and social development perspective on the role of universities viewing higher education as a route to skilled employment (BIS, 2016). The White Paper 'Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System' (BIS, 2011) presented three key challenges for the sector: the financial sustainability of universities, a quality student experience, and increasing social mobility. Since this paper there has been ongoing debate regarding funding for the sector, the Teaching Excellence Framework has been introduced (Department for Education, 2017b) and plans to improve social mobility continue to be outlined in reports such as Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential (Department for Education, 2017d). Throughout these changes commitment to the central principle of the Robbins Report (1963) that all who could benefit from higher education should be attending university (BIS, 2016) has remained, though the concept of benefiting from higher education is increasingly framed in terms of economic success.

Social mobility, the movement between the different strata of society, is a priority to reduce child poverty and inequality to avoid Britain becoming a divided nation (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2015). Cameron's 2010-2015 Coalition Government expressed concerns that social mobility was declining with people remaining in the social class of their birth (The Economist, 2014); therefore, continuing to expand higher education remains a key strategy in an attempt to improve the situation. The University Alliance (2014a p5) describes higher education as 'a critical engine' by allowing students from disadvantaged backgrounds to add personal value to enhance their job opportunities. While this may be the ideal of attending university, the OECD (2015a) has expressed concerns that the UK continues to experience inequality in social background and educational achievement with further work being

required to ensure equity in outcomes. Research by Bukodi, Goldthorpe, Waller and Kuha, (2015) found that mobility between classes still exists in the UK, but there is an increased tendency for the direction to be downward due to limited opportunities at the higher end of the occupational structure.

Brown (2014) believes the focus on improving social mobility by widening participation through recruiting more students from disadvantaged backgrounds is too narrow an approach to higher education. He recommends that a more effective way to determine success in overcoming a disadvantaged background would be to measure graduate outcomes in terms of social mobility. The Department for Education (2017c) considers a child to be disadvantaged if they have been, or are still, in local authority care or are from a low income background and are eligible for free school meals. Disadvantage leads to material poverty and a lack of resources, but Wilshaw (cited in Ofsted, 2013 p5) believes it also contributes to 'a poverty of expectations' where young people have lower expectations for their own educational success due to their family circumstances.

Data indicates that entering university from a disadvantaged background has a long-term impact. For example, HEFCE (2013) reported that 60.4% of students who attended an independent school prior to university were in a graduate-level job upon finishing their degree in comparison to only 46.7% of students from state schools. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014b) found a similar pattern of advantage with 73% of students whose parents occupy higher level jobs being able to secure a job at the same high-level in comparison to 67% of students from lower occupational backgrounds. HEFCE (2015) further found that students from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to occupy a professional position upon graduation. Brown (2014) suggests that without compromising academic study, universities need to implement better support systems if they are to help widening participation students overcome their disadvantaged backgrounds. If popular opinion remains that the purpose of attending university is to improve career prospects then this is potentially misleading students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may attend university to provide themselves a better future and improve their social position.

### 2.3 Social Mobility

Social mobility is influenced by a number of factors with education and occupational structure being the two main ones relevant to this study. From the 1950's through to the 1970's Britain experienced positive upward social mobility with a significant increase in the number of professional and managerial positions available and a reduction in working class roles (Goldthorpe & Mills, 2008) meaning graduates had plentiful opportunities to occupy higher-level positions than their parents. The changing job structure has now flattened off with limited higher level jobs available in comparison to the number of graduates competing for these roles. Goldthorpe (2013) posits that there has been absolute mobility over time with everyone in society being better off through the changing job structure. However, he argues there has not been relative social mobility, with people from disadvantaged backgrounds still occupying lower positions relative to advantaged social groups. Hills et al. (2010) deemed advantage is gained through higher family income levels that impact across a lifetime. Being from an advantaged family allows children to live in the catchment area for a good school, be financially supported to continue in education as well as spending time with parents in educational activities. Social background can also ward off downward mobility; Saunders (2002 p562) refers to this as the "stickiness of middle class" with parents utilising additional resources to maintain their class position for themselves and their children (Jackson, 2007). Irwin and Elley (2013) posit that middle-class parents normalise higher aspirations into their children's upbringing expecting them to achieve educationally and in the workplace thus stabilising class positions from one generation to the next. Saunders (2002) concluded that the lack of social mobility is due to individuals in higher class positions being able to maintain their situation and avoid downward mobility therefore causing a blockage in the system for talented lower class workers to progress.

Brown, Heath, Li and Nazroo's (2014) research found, that despite improving their educational performance, ethnic minorities continue to be a disadvantaged group, facing social inequality and barriers to employment in comparison to their white peers. They demonstrated that the level of inequality varies by ethnic group with the gap being even greater for immigrants in comparison to second generation ethnic group members who were born in the UK. Variations noted by ethnic group for example include males and females of Indian origin experiencing the closest employment

outcomes in comparison to white British, while Black African males and Bangladeshi women are the most likely to be unemployed. Differentiating social mobility by gender only, Li and Devine (2011) observed continuing upward social mobility for women in comparison to downward social mobility for men, though, consideration must be given to a woman's traditional lower occupational starting point due to the nature of the work and the lower levels they tend to occupy in an organisation. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2015) believe that even though social mobility is possible in Britain, overall it is an unequal and therefore, unjust society as there is a direct relationship between class origins and class destinations regarding occupational attainment.

The second factor playing a key role in improving social mobility is educational achievement (Jackson, 2007) as it contributes towards career success by providing recognised credentials that can be used to gain higher-level employment (Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic & Kaiser, 2013). Qualifications do represent educational capital, however, the value of a qualification is influenced by the economic and social worth of the holder (Bourdieu, 1984); those richer in capital are able to extract the full yield of the qualification by having the knowledge and connections to maximise access to employment. While the concept of meritocracy means organisations search for the most talented staff with decisions being based on an individual's ability, Breen and Goldthorpe's (1999) research concluded that children from disadvantaged origins had to demonstrate significantly more merit than socially advantaged children in order to succeed in improving their social class position through their occupation. Graduate recruitment will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, but it should be noted that in a competitive job market the practices used by organisations are increasingly sophisticated and challenging in their search for the most talented individuals (Branine, 2008). While they do not directly discriminate based on class, gender or ethnicity, recruitment processes can make it difficult for graduates from less advantaged backgrounds to demonstrate their merits and successfully secure employment.

It must be noted, though, that while upward social mobility can be achieved by attending university it is on an individual basis rather than for an overall population as education alone does not lead to equal job opportunities for all (Goldthorpe, 2013) since graduates have to personally negotiate the final transition from education to the workplace. May's Conservative Government continues to support the belief that social

mobility is achieved through education with policies covering early years provision through to post-16 education choices (Department for Education, 2017d). Furthermore, her government is also committed that education will translate into rewarding careers by providing advice and support networks aimed at young people from low income families. Despite government policy, though, the UK is still considered to be a divided nation in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, education and geographical location with the Social Mobility Commission (2017 piii) commenting that “those on the wrong side of this divide are losing out and falling behind”.

## 2.4 Moving towards Employability

The changing face of higher education has impacted upon the expected outcomes and benefits of attending university. Purcell et al.'s (2008) research identified that alongside an interest in the subject, the main reason for choosing a degree was to access good employment opportunities. In simple terms a graduate job can be considered as any role requiring the employee to hold a degree. For official data the Standard Occupational Classification 2010 (SOC2010) (ONS, 2010) categorises job roles into eight groups and considers the first two to be degree-level positions. The job roles associated with these categories are: managers, directors and senior officials, professional occupations and associate professional and technical occupations.

Porter (2014) and Vina (2016) however, found that many students fall short of their expectations in gaining skilled employment. From the 2013 cohort 79% of students anticipated a graduate-level role upon completing their studies, but in reality only 66.3% secured professional or managerial employment within six months of graduating (Redman, 2014). Labour market data from the Department for Education (2017e) identified that only 65% of graduates aged 21-30 were in high-skilled employment under SOC codes 1-3 (ONS, 2010). Comparative data for non-graduates showed just 16.6% to be in high-skilled employment indicating that it is still advantageous to have a degree even though all graduates do not benefit equally from their qualifications. The Department for Education (2017e) suggest that the reason for low graduate-level employment is due to the time it takes for young people to position themselves in the labour market in a role commensurate with their qualifications.

Increasing student numbers could be considered a contributory factor towards lower-skilled employment outcomes than expected. In summer 2008 a total of 319 260 students graduated with a first degree (HESA, 2009), a figure that stands at 414,340 in 2017 representing a 23% rise (HESA, 2018b). Data from High Fliers Research (2009, 2018) identified that the growth in vacancies within the top 100 graduate employers only rose by 13% during the same period of time. The top 100 graduate employers offer prestigious, highly sought after schemes that are considered to be a fast-track to a successful career. Although there are many more graduate roles offered in smaller organisations, High Fliers Research (2018) positions itself as an indicator of the overall buoyancy of the graduate employment market.

Cai (2013) posits that the focus on graduate employment outcomes means this data is increasingly being used as a quality measure in higher education. Since 2011 the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) has required all universities to publish a Key Information Set of data at a course level that includes employment rates and the proportion of students in appropriate graduate-level jobs. Employment outcomes continue to be a key measure within the TEF (Department for Education, 2017b) so developing employability amongst students is now considered a priority by the sector with advice and support services available being published on university websites in addition to employability initiatives at course level.

Jackson (2015) believes universities have a significant role to play in supporting progression from study into work, but the overall emphasis on employability has moved to the micro-level with graduates being seen as responsible for their own personal development (Tomlinson, 2012). Brynin (2013) views higher education as a private investment of time and money with students taking a personal risk as to whether they will secure appropriate employment upon graduation. Artess (2019) recommends that to support students, universities should adopt a learner-centred approach to career development and employability with early engagement, during the first and second year, being important for identifying clear career plans to assist students with their transition into the labour market. Education is more than a consumer good however (Jary, 2014), as a degree in itself does not guarantee a high-level job (Tomlinson, 2008). McArthur (2011) acknowledges that while university does have an economic role to play, the current narrow functionalist view should be broadened to value other benefits such as developing questioning, free-thinking

individuals who can form their own identity. Holmes (2013) regards these wider values and attributes as essential in developing a graduate identity that subsequently helps students become employable and supports them in their transition from education to the workplace.

Employability is highly subjective and personal to an individual student (Rothwell, Herbert & Rothwell, 2008) meaning not all graduates have an equal chance of securing high-level work upon completing their studies. Experiences in education and the workplace are moderated by personal circumstances and this chapter will now focus on conceptualising inequalities based on class, gender and ethnicity.

## 2.5 Conceptualising Inequalities

Adopting a philosophical approach to sociology (Grenfell, 2012), the work of Pierre Bourdieu explores the 'science of human practice' (Wacquant, 2008 p263) to explain social processes in everyday life. Bourdieu, a highly reflexive sociologist, recognised that his personal social trajectory, elevating him from rural France to the leading institutions of Paris, was influential upon his work. Bourdieu's extensive writing included analysis of the French education system with his ideal being that education leads to an inclusive society (Robbins, 2012). Education has the potential to be transformative, but for many children the outcome is pessimistic with school reproducing social relations and inequalities in society (Mills, 2008). In order to improve an individual's social position through education, consideration must be given to the role of agency and an individual's ability to change their circumstances.

The relationship between structure and agency remains central to social theory debates on whether individuals enjoy freedom of choice in their actions or they are constrained with limited opportunities due to the social structures of society (Sibeon, 2004). Bourdieu (1977) viewed subjectivism and objectivism as agonistic with each being one side of the epistemology. Objectivism posits that a structured set of social relations and forces subconsciously condition an individual's behaviour, so that they conform in a patterned and expected manner depending upon their position in society. Individuals are products rather than producers of social reality, influenced by invisible social structures that are only manifested through the observable practice and actions of its members. In contrast, subjectivism focuses on social reality being the total of



individual acts, each one open to interpretation where meaning and understanding can be constructed. Subjectivism is based on personal freedom where individuals act independently to shape their own experiences.

Elliott (2014) suggests that an increasingly complex contemporary society requires a more fluid interpretation of action than the rigidity of structuralism, but equally so is not able to embrace the liberation offered by existentialism. Bourdieu (1989) recognised that agents had an ability to make choices, but objective structures in the world around them set limits to these choices. To overcome the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism, and allow meaningful analysis of social reality (Wacquant, 2008), Bourdieu theorised the triadic relationship between capital, habitus and field as synergistically intertwined concepts that influence an individual's practice. Costa, Burke and Murphy (2019) believe these concepts provide a valuable framework to explain both social reproduction and social transformation in society.

Holding structure and agency in tension (Reay et al., 2005), habitus enables individual trajectories to be studied. Agents are characterised by their background predisposing them to certain behaviours through an implicit understanding of unwritten codes of practice. While many people behave as expected based on the conditions of their background, Bourdieu (1990a) argues, particularly in his later work, that habitus allows the space for individual agency as behaviour is never entirely predictable with explicit rules and principles as agents always have the potential to change their situation. Consideration must be given, though, to how an individual can develop the capacity to change their habitus. Reay (2004) posits that habitus can change through socialisation and exposure to new experiences, citing education as an example of a potentially life-changing experience that can alter an individual's habitus.

Habitus marks an individual's position in social space acting as the linking mechanism between capital and field. Both of these concepts will be discussed later in this chapter as I will firstly focus on habitus. An internalised system, habitus shapes an agent's perceptions, thoughts, feelings and ultimately actions (Vaara & Fay, 2011). Practice should be congruent to the logic of the field, though, if an agent is to participate effectively (Bourdieu, 1993a). Bourdieu (1977 p72) defined habitus as:

‘systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles of the generation of structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules.’

Habitus, the embodiment of cultural norms based on family background, generates rather than determines practice allowing agents to accommodate unforeseen situations and cope with the future. Habitus is the result of past experiences learnt through socialisation processes from childhood onwards (Silva, 2015). Through inculcation habitus becomes “durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions” (Bourdieu 1993b, p86). As a consequence of habitus everyday actions are unintentional and instinctive based on an agent’s background which Bourdieu (1990b p57) refers to as the “installed generative principle of regulated improvisations”. Social structures are therefore ingrained into a person and unconsciously exhibited through bodily actions and hexis (Bourdieu, 1977). Maton (2012 p64) notes that hexis is the past “enscribed onto the body in terms of gait, posture, stance, stride, facial expressions, and so forth” and therefore contributes towards the revelation of an individual’s habitus.

As a system of dispositions, habitus marks an individual’s position in social space through their practice. People from the same social group, sharing the same social space also tend to share the same taste; a point Bourdieu referred to as the ‘internalization of externality’ (Robbins, 2000 p16). It is through these experiences and material conditions of existence that an agent unconsciously learns the possibilities in life that are available and desirable for them. Therefore, an individual is likely to achieve their “subjective expectations of objective probabilities” (Bourdieu, 1990b p59) and choose the outcome that is expected of them given their circumstances.

Bourdieu is criticised by Jenkins (1992) as he contends that habitus is a tight concept with practice being determined by objective social structures and relations to reproduce divisions in society rather than allowing agents freedom to make their own choices. Archer (2000) is also critical, believing that the objective and subjective cannot be integrated, though, she does recognise they should be cross-referenced to each other so that an individual’s subjective choices can be set into the context of their

external structures. McNay (2000) argues however, that Bourdieu viewed habitus as a generative rather than deterministic process with the potential for it to change through new experiences. Fowler (1997) posits that Bourdieu's epistemological stance of structural constructivism means objective structures set limits to an agent's choice of goals, influencing and potentially restricting practice. Burke (2016 p8) similarly agrees that "habitus is a set of generative improvisations – however these are framed – and, therefore, are constrained/ regulated by the structure in question". Nash (1999) also believes that agents tend to have a limited range of options, but does acknowledge that they have the ability to be unpredictable and break from their original habitus. Burke (2016) suggests that this is a reflection of real life particularly when taking into account Reay's (2004) assertion that the real world is complex and messy.

Bourdieu (1984) himself rejected structuralism arguing that individuals can use the capital at their disposal to strategically manoeuvre themselves into positions of power and dominance in a field. Rawolle and Lingard, (2008) suggest that in his later work Bourdieu's use of the word agent emphasised his belief that agency is located within the individual rather than the structures they inhabit allowing flexibility and subjectivity rather than a strict adherence to unwritten rules. Even though an individual's behaviour is not pre-determined it should be recognised that actions are frequently bound up with the past (Schlosser, 2013) as people from a dominated class are likely to make choices that are objectively constrained based on their habitus (Fowler, 1997).

Habitus can operate at an individual or a collective level (Silva, 2015). Rather than a fixed group habitus, Bourdieu (1977) suggests people sharing similar social conditions will share similar experiences. These experiences shape, but do not determine an individual habitus as everyone has a unique set of personal circumstances that influences their practice (Grenfell & James, 1998). Maton (2012) posits therefore, that an agent's relationship between the two relational structures of habitus and field provides an understanding of their practice. Grenfell (2012) advocates analysing the field first to gain an understanding of the wider picture before focusing on agents and their individual situation. Agents with a habitus that is homologous to the field will feel comfortable, like a "fish in water", and be able follow the rules of the field in order to successfully mobilise their capitals to gain a dominant position. Conversely, agents with a habitus that is not compatible may have a sense of being a 'fish out of water'

(Clark & Zukas, 2013), feeling uncomfortable in a field or even struggling to gain access. Bourdieu (1977) refers to the mismatch between habitus and field as the hysteresis effect where an agent's disposition lags behind the required behaviours to take advantage of available opportunities in the field. Chapter Four, Sections 4.8.1-3 provides further discussion on Bourdieu's concepts and how these have been operationalised in my thesis.

Everyday practice generated through habitus marks the relative position in social space occupied by agents that act as an indicator of inequality within society (Bourdieu, 1984). Positions are based on the volume and composition of an individual's capital (Crossley, 2012) with those holding high levels dominating the field. Bourdieu (1984) views capital as a resource that through unequal distribution is a source of power. Capital is traditionally associated with economic exchange, but Bourdieu broadened the use of the term to include different forms of capital, such as cultural and social capital, that can be transformed and exchanged within and across fields to the holders advantage (Moore, 2012). The concept of capital, and its different forms, is discussed further in Section 2.5.1.

Hills, Cunliffe, Obolenskaya and Karragiannaki (2015) report that structural inequality remains persistent in the UK with an unequal labour market making it difficult for employees at lower levels to improve their position. In addition, they found that despite being the best qualified generation to date young people particularly experience difficulties in exercising their agency to gain access to challenging employment structures. Roberts (2009) maintains that the opportunity structure theory proposed in the 1960s is still relevant today. Structures in society are "primarily formed by the inter-relationships between family backgrounds, education, labour market processes and employers' recruitment practices" (Roberts, 2009 p335) where adolescents from a disadvantaged background face limited opportunities upon the transition from education to work. While Furlong (2013a) does not support a determinist model affecting young people's entry into the workplace, he recognises that the transmission of intergenerational disadvantage continues to affect their future life chances.

Structural inequality is embedded across a range of institutions such as housing, healthcare and employment with disadvantage being accumulated across a lifetime.

Dorling (2015) posits that elitism, practiced by those holding power within these institutions, actively excludes people from lower positions in society accessing opportunities to improve their situation. The foundations of inequality are laid down during childhood. As previously discussed, successive government policy considers education to be a key factor in improving social mobility (Department for Education, 2017d) however, the education system tends to reinforce privilege rather than being a catalyst for change (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

### 2.5.1 Inequalities in Education

A deeply rooted habitus is invisible (Murdock, 2010), inculcating an agent through primary socialisation in the family and secondary socialisation in the education system. Through their upbringing individuals acquire holdings of capital that can be used as a resource to influence their position in society. Bourdieu (1984) identified four main forms of capital. Firstly, economic capital which Bourdieu related to mercantile exchange and the acquisition of material possessions. Capital is more complex than purely monetary holdings, so Bourdieu also identified cultural capital which relates to personal tastes, linguistics, behaviours, knowledge and skills. Cultural capital can take three forms; firstly it can be embodied through long-lasting dispositions which are an indication of an individual's habitus from childhood (Burke, 2016) with the embodiment being observed indirectly through social practice. Cultural capital can also take on an objectified state in the form of material possessions and artefacts. Finally, cultural capital can be in an institutionalised state where it is formally recognised in a field, for example, qualifications to gain entry to the job market.

A third form of capital identified by Bourdieu (1984) is social capital which is the development of networks and social contacts. Social contacts can be used to gain advantage if they have value in relation to a particular field. For example, by providing work experience or sharing knowledge on how to access a field. Burke and Hannaford-Simpson (2019) believe possessing social capital is increasingly important in a competitive graduate labour market as having access to appropriate contacts helps initial entry into a field as well as long-term progression through support and guidance. Finally, Bourdieu referred to symbolic capital where the other forms of capital confer

status and class, positioning an individual in social space as capital is only valuable when recognised by others (Moore, 2012).

Tracing the relationship between the field of education and family, Bourdieu identified the significance of economic and cultural capital in academic and occupational success (Dillon, 2014). Cultural capital can be developed in school through the curriculum, but cultural transmission is more effectively embodied when reinforced through experiences at home (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Families with a higher socio-economic status have the ability to turn their economic capital into cultural capital by acquiring enhanced educational opportunities for their children, a process that Bourdieu referred to as transubstantiation (Moore, 2012). Activities such as reading with parents, museum visits and days out allow a child to develop an educational habitus and dispositions that correspond with the values of the field of education. Through these practices the education system confers legitimacy upon middle-class culture to help maintain their advantaged position (Crossley, 2012). Teachers are more likely to respond and reward students when behaviour meets the criteria to be successful in the education system, such as completing homework, engaging with classroom activities and not being disruptive.

Bourdieu (1984) believed fields are socially constructed spaces that can be mapped in terms of economic and cultural capital. When referring to a field, Bourdieu used the word *le champ*, which means a battlefield, indicating they are sites for struggle and positioning (Thomson, 2012). A field is a hierarchical structure with dominant agents and institutions holding power and being positioned based on their holdings of capital and their personal disposition. To be successful in a field players need to have a 'feel for the game' and understand the rules that control a particular field (Thomson, 2012).

The value of capital is therefore contingent to the field so to be successful requires the possession of relevant capital accompanied by an ability to mobilise it for personal advantage (Devine & Savage, 2005). The field of education contains progressive levels with different rules for the game being introduced as a student moves from one stage of education to the next. The transition to higher education probably presents the greatest challenge due to the highly complex entry system. In the UK there are 164 higher education institutions (HESA, n.d.) each offering a range of subjects with

their own specific entry criteria. Operating in conjunction with UCAS who handle applications, entry to university is a difficult process to complete particularly for agents who cannot draw on advice and experience of the higher education system from their immediate circle of contacts. Davey (2012) found middle-class parents, possessing higher levels of cultural capital, were better placed in terms of decision making and organising their children's education to help them negotiate the system. This is reinforced by Naidoo's (2004) research that indicated a lack of cultural capital acts as a barrier to accessing higher education. Agents without experience of university in their social network, and an understanding of the rules for entry, can find it difficult to access the field making it particularly difficult for working-class students to gain a degree.

Robbins (2000) suggested that rather than promoting social justice and equality the education system continues to reproduce a stratified society with family background still being a significant factor in academic and employment success. There is a tendency for students to select institutions that complement their familial habitus with choices showing marked preferences based on class, gender and ethnicity (Reay et al., 2005). Snee and Devine (2014) similarly found that young people were able to exert agency in their transition to further education, but their choices demonstrated classed trajectories due to the advice received from family and friends. Notwithstanding students being accepted onto degrees providing they meet the entry criteria, the reality is cultural arbitrariness, generated by doxa, have an effect on behaviour (Lovell, 2000) meaning values are shared and practice subconsciously reproduced to favour those exhibiting high levels of educational capital (Vaara & Fay, 2011). Bourdieu (2000 p16) defines doxa as "a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma." Doxa therefore, refers to the pre-reflexive, unquestioned understanding and deeply-rooted beliefs shared by agents who are familiar with a field allowing them to practice naturally within its bounds (Deer, 2012). Since doxa is silent (Bourdieu, 1977), it allows the dominant to maintain their position as people from lower social backgrounds accept situations without fully understanding them and, therefore, exclude themselves from opportunities to improve their position in life (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992).

Bourdieu (1984) argued that the education system itself can act as an institutionalised classifier; reproducing positions in society and the social order. The higher education system continues to reinforce privilege through elite universities (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002) with, for example, institutions in the Russell Group being regarded as more prestigious than the ex-polytechnics (Ingram & Bathmaker, 2013). Naidoo (2004) found universities position themselves in a hierarchical structure based on the nature of their institution, subconsciously classifying students by their social background and favouring those possessing a disposition to be academically successful. The structure of higher education in the UK is supported by a plethora of league tables, such as The Complete University Guide, The Guardian League Table and The Times League Table that rank the traditional research intensive universities higher than the newer teaching focused institutions. Jerrim's (2013) research indicates working-class students are less likely to attend high-status universities tending to favour newer institutions that are viewed by the middle-class as being towards the bottom of the system.

Through practising naturally in the field dominant players maintain their position (Bourdieu, 1977) with students from an advantaged background using their cultural capital to gain entry to prestigious institutions. Ebdon (cited in Ross, 2013) has accused university admission systems of middle-class bias that fails to recruit talented working-class students. Bathmaker (2015) further suggests that the increasing choice in higher education institutions actually preserves elitism as non-traditional students are more likely to prefer the learning environment in a newer institution even when they hold the qualifications to enter more prestigious universities.

Each university possesses its own institutional habitus that reflects the culture and practice of the institution and impacts upon an individual student's experience. Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) refer to working-class students attending elite universities as 'strangers in paradise' as they struggle to adjust and identify with the environment they have entered. A university's institutional habitus is relatively fixed so students are expected to adapt to their environment rather than the university accommodating different student's needs (Byrom & Lightfoot, 2012).

Bourdieu and Champagne's (1993 p422) suggestion that academic success does "not ensure access to the social positions that it once did" echoes concerns that the increasing number of graduates has effected stable career rhythms (Collins, 1989)



and questions the value of holding a degree. While a degree is a condition for entry into the field of graduate employment it does not guarantee an actual job; intense competition means non-merit characteristics such as social skills and personality traits are valued and have an impact on employment decisions (Jackson, 2007). Legitimising structures of inequality through recruitment decisions is a form of symbolic violence (Wacquant, 2008) with Brown, Power, Tholen and Allouch's research (2014) concluding that those from disadvantaged social backgrounds continue to receive 'rough justice' as only a few will succeed to improve their employment prospects in comparison to their family origins. Bourdieu (1984 p139) referred to this as the "cheating of a generation" where education has raised individual hopes and ambitions that will not necessarily be fulfilled through employment opportunities.

Symbolic violence allows power to be exerted without physical force by those in a dominant position "letting the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise their domination" (Bourdieu 1977 p190). Leading to suffering and the perpetuation of inequality, symbolic violence is frequently misrecognised and not acknowledged as a form of oppression due to it lacking a visible presence (Schubert, 2012).

For Bourdieu (1996) the education system represents a duality by objectively reproducing social divisions through credentials and positioning individuals in occupations while simultaneously inculcating them subjectively with their understanding of the social world. While education can be viewed as an opportunity to improve an individual's position in life it is not simply a process of progressing through the system and entering the workplace. Opportunities are not experienced on an equal basis with some facing a more difficult journey than others. Final outcomes are influenced by personal factors and the role of class, gender and ethnicity must be considered in relation to education and employment.

## 2.6 Class

The term class is used to identify a group of people sharing a position in society based on their resources where inequality is reflected between the different levels (Milner 1999). Social class remains a contested concept with a plurality of definitions and continuing debates on its role in contemporary social theory (Olin Wright, 2005).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, social class was considered by many to be a less significant marker of an individual's position in society (Giddens, 1994) with Pakulski and Waters (1996) stating that class was dead. Beck (1992) similarly writes on the loss of collective identity, proposing instead his 'individualisation' thesis. He posits that in a modern society agents make their own decisions to "reflexively construct their own biographies" (Beck, 1992 p3) rather than being constrained by structures. In a critique of Beck, Atkinson (2007) argues that individualisation theory overlooks the unequal distribution of socio-economic assets as well as access to other resources that lead to social differentiation and therefore, the concept of class cannot be ignored.

Toynbee (2011) emphatically also disputes that class is dead arguing Britain is still a deeply classed society with persistent segregation and therefore class contributing to social inequality (Visram 2013). Instead, Skeggs (1997) believes class is less visible in our society as it has become legitimised and institutionalised with those not affected by deprivation being unaware of the exclusion class causes. Woodward, Murji, Neal and Watson (2014) posit class is still an ever present source of inequality, but has featured less prominently in recent years due to increasing diversity in the literature and the emergence of debate on additional inequalities such as gender and ethnicity. The recent austerity measures from 2010 onwards have highlighted the level of inequality in the UK in terms of class division and poverty raising both academic and public interest in the continuing British preoccupation with social class (Skeggs, 2015).

Amongst sociologists there is no single definition of the different levels of class. Giddens' (1973) proposal for a three-tier system encompassing both ends of the spectrum: upper-class capitalists; middle-class heterogeneous white collar workers with recognised skills and qualifications and a working-class occupying manual jobs is viewed as a simple method for dividing people into classes (Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman & Moore, 2013). These terms are commonly adopted by the wider public to recognise different social positions without people necessarily being able to clearly define them. Giddens and Sutton (2013) believe that the foundations of traditional class analysis, based on the work of Marx and Weber, are no longer sufficient to capture the intricacy of modern society with the increasing range of work roles, skill levels and lifestyles requiring a more complex differentiation. However, official data in the UK is based on job roles using SOC2010 to construct the National Statistics Socio-

Economic Classification (NS-SEC) (ONS, 2010) as shown in Table 2.1. Measuring both employment relations and the conditions of the occupation the classification is based on the work of Goldthorpe (2007). The Office for National Statistics, recognising his schema's empirical underpinning and conceptual clarity, completed further validation of the work before developing it into their final classification (ONS, 2010).

Using SOC2010 with its more detailed job descriptions than previous schemes (Rose & Pevalin, 2010), every adult in the UK can be allocated a position in the NS-SEC table. Category 1 and 2 are seen as middle-class jobs and 5, 6 and 7 working-class while category 3 and 4 are intermediate with jobs exhibiting characteristics from both middle and working-class roles (Roberts, 2011). Individualising class rather than following the traditional collective approach, the NS-SEC allocates a class position based on personal job roles rather than the main earner in a household; therefore, ignoring the well-documented effect of family background on life chances (Blackburn, 1998).

Table 2.1 Office for National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification: Analytic Version

1	Higher managerial and professional occupations 1.1 Larger employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations. 1.2 Higher professional occupations.
2	Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations
3	Intermediate occupations
4	Small employers and own account workers
5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations
6	Semi-routine occupations
7	Routine occupations
8	Never worked and long-term unemployed

(ONS, 2010 p3)

Crompton (2010) posits that employment-based classifications are problematic acting as a proxy rather than absolute measure of class. For example, a person without a job would be classed in category 8 under the NS-SEC, but an individual who has never worked due to family wealth is likely to experience different opportunities in comparison to someone who is long-term unemployed and living in an area of high deprivation. Roberts (2011) therefore, believes basing class on job roles rather than wealth does not adequately capture everyone who does not work. In addition, Crompton (2010) further points out that the NS-SEC does not take into account ascriptive variables such as gender and race that can also influence employment outcomes. Dorling's (2014) suggestion that an occupation-based class structure is no longer an indication that individuals occupying the same position in society earn a similar income and share similar life experiences leads to questions regarding the usefulness of NS-SEC in analysing class. Inequalities in society clearly influence life chances, but as the social world changes the meaning of class needs to be re-conceptualised. Instead, Dorling (2014) believes family background; wealth and where you live are now better markers of social position.

Irwin (2015) posits that class has become increasingly individualised and opaque with a loss of collective identity in relation to occupation. She suggests that class identification is now more complex with people positioning themselves socially through diverse experiences. Taking into consideration the limitations of occupation-based class analysis, a cultural approach has more recently risen to prominence highlighting the importance of behaviours as well as resources in an attempt to capture the complexity of class in modern society. A number of leading sociologists have adopted Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of capital, field and habitus to analyse social space and class, recognising its ability to address the subjectivity of individual situations. For example, Skeggs' (1997) study of working class women, Reay et al.'s (2005) evaluation of class and choice of university and Bennett et al.'s (2009) analysis of cultural practice and class in Britain.

Using data from the BBC's online Great British Class Survey Savage et al. (2013), in an attempt to provide a comprehensive map of class, adopted a cultural approach based on the holdings of capital in their proposal for a new social classification schema. Questions were designed to establish a respondent's economic, cultural and

social capital before mapping positions using multiple correspondence analysis to produce the new social classification categories identified in Table 2.2. Category 2, established middle class, and category 5, traditional working class, reflect conventional social positions, but Savage et al. (2013) believe the new categories reflect a socially fragmented and polarised Britain. A range of associated job roles are seen as being typical for each classification, but these are not fixed as classification is based on holdings of capital rather than occupation. The elite, placed as the top category, have high levels of economic, cultural and social capital providing a privileged position in society while the precariat score poorly on all measures, leading to insecurity and uncertainty in their lives.

Table 2.2 Social Classifications based on the Great British Class Survey

1	Elite
2	Established middle class
3	Technical middle class
4	New affluent workers
5	Traditional working class
6	Emergent service workers
7	Precariat

(Savage et al., 2013, p230)

The Great British Class Survey, and therefore the resulting social classifications, has generated significant debate with Silva (2015) considering the results to be populist and media-centred rather than engaging in deeper academic debate. Mills (2014, 2015) is highly critical believing the methodology to be flawed with a bias towards younger, better educated respondents leading to questions regarding the validity of the results. Bradley (2014), while commending the principle of trying to generate a class schema based on culture, posits that the result is gradational rather than relational as it clusters respondents on a number of attributes which therefore does not fully reflect Bourdieu's work on class analysis.

### 2.6.1 Bourdieu's Approach to Class

Bourdieu's approach to class is all encompassing, accommodating any occupation within the division of labour due to measuring an individual's relative location in society rather than the job role itself. Bourdieu's model of class structure positions agents in social space through the theoretical analysis of meaningful factors that are derived from their possession of capital (Weininger, 2004). Focusing predominantly on economic and cultural capital, an agent's position is determined by both the volume and weight of capital relative to the structure of the field (Bourdieu, 1984). Economic capital, measuring income and wealth, is easier to quantify, but cultural capital can be more difficult to identify. Goods and artefacts that indicate taste in relation to art, literature and music are viewed as a mark of an individual's class background (Skeggs, 2004). A third dimension, trajectory, predicts the likely path that will be taken in the field based on holdings of capital. Bourdieu (1984) correlated cultural capital to educational capital meaning agents from a higher class are more likely to use the capital at their disposal to gain qualifications to maintain their social position.

Analysing positions in social space through an individual's habitus represents a relational approach to class which is in contrast to the traditional gradational approach based on class structure and class consciousness to allocate an individual a 'rung' within the class ladder (Wacquant, 2013). Rather than developing a class schema that specifically categorises a person, Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of class maps an individual's social position three- dimensionally based on volume and composition of capital in conjunction with trajectory. The mapping of spatial distances on paper does not necessarily lead to the same social distances being physically experienced in real life, though Bourdieu (1989) acknowledges agents sharing similar amounts of capital tend to share common lifestyles and are likely to encounter each other in social space.

Within his work Bourdieu (1984) does refer to the three social groupings of working, middle and upper class when discussing lifestyles and patterns of consumption to recognise different levels within society. When analysing class, Bourdieu focuses on the role of power identifying the existence of two classes within a field, the dominant and the dominated with the position taken being due to relative holdings of capital relevant to the field. The dominant class depends upon the field being analysed with

those holding power in one field not necessarily having the same position within a different field. However, agents with high levels of economic, cultural and social capital are likely to be able to hold a dominant position across a number of fields. Fields are dynamic spaces (Webb et al., 2002) with the dominant class changing the rules to maintain their position unless influenced by a powerful external force such as government legislation.

Class is therefore hidden within a multiplicity of everyday practices (Bourdieu, 1984) as habitus is an internalised form of class conditioning, inscribing an individual with the conditions of their existence. Habitus unifies people from similar backgrounds influencing agents as producers of classified acts as well as the acts themselves leading to the classification of the agents (Bourdieu, 1987). A deeply inculcated habitus and access to capital has an impact on life chances from childhood onwards with educational achievement being closely associated with class. Perry and Francis (2010 p2) in their review of educational attainment comment that “social class remains the strongest predictor of educational achievement in the UK”.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) believe the education system legitimises inequalities with schools imposition of arbitrary cultural expectations upon pupils being a form of symbolic violence. Expectations for success, based on middle-class values and practices, form a system of power to maintain dominant positions in the field of education. Educational inequality based on class persists in the UK with working-class children continuing to underperform at each stage of the educational process in comparison to their middle-class peers (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). Willis’ (1977) discussion on the construction of working-class male identity through cultural experiences at school and home demonstrated their resistance to opportunities offered through education with young boys accepting they would enter work as low-skilled manual labourers. Plummer (2000), in contrast, found that working-class girls who successfully trained to be teachers were forced to psychologically break with their upbringing to enter the middle-class lifestyle associated with their profession.

Social class, and the ensuing inequalities it leads to, is deeply embedded in daily life in the UK. Despite successive government’s commitment to reducing the social divide (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2015) class divisions are legitimised in

the educational institutions that are meant to remove them. Bourdieu's (1984, 1989) analysis of class demonstrates the complexity of social relations and the intricate cultural web that locates agents in social space depending upon their capital. Bourdieu (1977), while recognising individuals possess agency within the social structures they inhabit, simultaneously believes a deeply inculcated habitus constrains choice and opportunities. Social class is not only a predictor of educational achievement in the UK it also has an impact upon employment opportunities and occupational success (Weinger, 2000).

Based on the discussion above Bourdieu's relational approach to class will be adopted in this thesis using the concept of the dominant and dominated within a field. The terms middle and working class will be used to acknowledge their everyday usage within the literature that represent different levels within society, but Bourdieu's (1984) tools of capital, habitus and field will be used for analysis and mapping positions in social space. Bourdieu's work provides a rich contextualisation of class recognising the importance of power and the role of capital and habitus in shaping life opportunities. Occupation-based schema may be useful to quickly categorise people using their job role, but this approach does not capture the complexity of class and the wide ranging factors that influence a person's position in society. Without the requisite holdings of capital, able individuals face barriers in accessing the upper echelons of education and the workplace with many accepting lower positions as their lot in life. Through cultural classed practices talented young people from deprived backgrounds are structurally being denied the same opportunities as those from more culturally and economically advantaged homes. To reiterate Toynbee's (2011) earlier point, Britain remains a classed society with social background being an indicator of life chances. Class is not the only barrier to occupational success, though, and the role of gender will now be considered.

## 2.7 Gender

From his early studies in Algeria Bourdieu identified that an opposition existed between males and females that was socially constructed through practice to form a key division in society (Fowler, 2003). Men, as public facing capital accumulating objects, generate economic capital on behalf of a family while women, focusing on the



private sphere of home and family, are capital bearing objects demonstrating their worth through tastes and behaviours (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu believed that through their possession of capital men adopted dominant and powerful positions (Dillabough, 2004) that allowed them to influence key, decision-making institutions in society. Even though Bourdieu considered women to be private facing he believed they still contribute to the continuing social division in society by transferring cultural, social and therefore, symbolic capital to their children to maintain a family's social position (Lovell, 2000). Families in the dominant class therefore educate both males and females to a high level, continuing to reinforce class divisions within society (Bourdieu, 1996).

McLeod (2005) links Bourdieu's notion of habitus to the process of gender socialisation providing deep-rooted cultural influences that are internalised by an individual to develop a masculine or feminine identity (Ryle, 2015). Habitus helps form a gendered body that bears the unwritten social rules for language, dress and behaviour (Shi, 2001). Through habitus gendered social practice is deeply ingrained with differing expectations for male and female roles leading to the continuing dominance of men in positions of power. Arnot (2002) argues that individuals have the potential to change and break the cycle of gender divisions, but it is a slow process as habitus tends to reproduce attitudes and behaviours from one generation to the next. Bourdieu (2001) believes that the gender division is socially constructed, but biological differences are used by society to justify the male position commenting that:

'it legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalized social construction.'  
(Bourdieu 2001 p23)

Masculine domination is a form of symbolic violence where men are seen as the universal, controlling the social order from a perspective that denies women equal access to resources (Krais, 2006). Webb et al. (2002) posit that women misrecognise their position in society, accepting it as the way of the world rather than being dominated by a system that has been socially constructed to advantage men. The corporeal inculcation of this opposition between men and women leads to the development of gender identities that reinforce power relations so that social differences appear to be the naturalised practice in a field (McNay, 2000). Socialisation also leads to the production of gender stereotypes that reflect the norms of a particular

society (Stark, 2014). While openly discriminating against an employee based on their sex is illegal, gender stereotyping continues to impact on practice with organisations usually viewing female characteristics less benevolently in comparison to male ones (Cunningham & MacRae, 2011).

The traditional model of male breadwinner and stay-at-home housewife that was accepted as the normal pattern for family life until the 1970's now appears outmoded in contemporary society (Bradley, 2013). Over the last 50 years females have benefited from increased educational opportunities to the point that they now consistently outperform males academically (Turner, 2015). The OECD (2015b) found that upon leaving school girls overall perform better due to higher levels of reading and spending more time on homework. Their findings also showed that while high-performing males were equally successful as females, 50% of boys do not meet basic standards due to succumbing to peer pressure and disengaging with school and education. Women have particularly benefited from accessing higher education, and with 56% of undergraduates in 2016/17 being female they now outnumber males (HESA, 2018b). Additionally, 77% of females obtained a 2.1/ 1<sup>st</sup> in 2017 in comparison to 72% of males (HESA, 2018b). When choosing a degree, Reay et al. (2005) note a gendered educational habitus influences decisions. Females tend to prefer newer institutions closer to home rather than traditional Russell group universities, a decision that could potentially limit their later job opportunities due to the institutions position in the employment market.

### 2.7.1 Gender Positions in the Field of Work

Although women form 47% of the workforce (ONS, 2018a) academic success does not translate in to comparable achievement in the labour market with working practices continuing to impact on women's employment (Lyonette, 2015). The nature of women's participation in the workforce is structured by deep-seated gender relations that are still influenced by the dichotomy of male domination and female subordination (Lloyd, 2005; Munoz Boudet, Boudet, Petesch, Turk & Thumala, 2013). Aust, Emmerson and Cameron (2014) report that even though equality and flexibility in the workplace is positively promoted, by organisations such as the CBI and TUC, employees not working to a full-time, traditional pattern are disadvantaged in terms of

the type and level of work undertaken with women experiencing both horizontal and vertical occupational segregation (Wood, 2008). Horizontal segregation occurs when males and females occupy different job sectors with women's roles focusing on caring for others, administrative work and the service sector (ONS, 2017a). The Women and Work Commission (2006) refer to women's work as the five 'C's: caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical occupations. In contrast, men favour technical-based jobs in engineering, technology and the skilled trades such as electricians and plumbers (ONS, 2017a). Truss, Alfes, Schantz and Rosewarne (2013) describe female jobs as ghetto occupations due to their low status, low pay and poor working terms and conditions.

Even when women work in the same industry as men they face vertical segregation tending to occupy lower levels in the organisational hierarchy. Vinnicombe, Sealy and Humbert (2017) report only 9.8% of FTSE-100 executive directorships are held by women in the UK. In addition, men dominate senior positions in public decision-making institutions such as politics, the judiciary and the civil service (Centre for Women and Democracy, 2014) leading to men being over represented in positions of power and control. Ezzedeen, Budworth and Baker (2015) believe the glass ceiling, a term used to denote the invisible barrier that prevents women accessing senior management, is therefore still firmly intact. Ryan and Haslam (2009) refer to a woman's career path as a glass cliff to denote it is slippery and difficult to climb while Williams, Muller and Kilanski (2012) posit that men's career progression is accelerated leading to their dominance in management positions.

Borgerson and Rehn (2004) posit that the social construction of masculinity and femininity as opposites leads to specific roles in society being identified as appropriate for either males or females and therefore contributing to occupational segregation. Kramer and Ben-Ner's (2015) research indicates that organisations frequently make decisions based on surface-level attributes of both sex and race with discriminatory practice taking place until a deeper understanding of a person's abilities is developed. Archer (1992) suggests that males experience more rigidity in roles that are considered acceptable for them since a man fulfilling a typically female role is viewed with suspicion. However, Powell, Bagilhole and Dainty (2009) found female engineers experienced difficulties entering a male-dominated occupation often being regarded as unfeminine and having to adopt male practices in order to be accepted. Mavin's

(2006) research similarly indicated successful women adopted masculine behaviours to progress in organisations.

Connell's (1987) discussion on the gender order at home and work identified men as being advantaged through three social structures. The division of labour identifies roles as being either male or female with men's work being more highly regarded than women's while the structure of cathexis, reflecting social relations and emotions, also places men in a more dominant position in the public sphere. The structure of power examines authority and control with men occupying decision-making positions in organisational hierarchies leading to institutions being viewed as patriarchal (Walby, 1990). Kimmel (2008) found institutions are gendered by creating normative standards for behaviour that focus on male working patterns and attitudes to work meaning women often shy away from male-dominated industries (Huppatz, 2012). A point furthered by Pullman (2015) positing that it is more difficult for women to exert their agency in current structures due to rigid working practices such as long inflexible working hours and the dominance of male management.

It must be noted that the structural barriers preventing women accessing the workplace can also limit a man's ability to fulfil their parenting role. Men are considered unencumbered employees able to work long hours and fulfil additional commitments (Williams et al. 2012). The Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009) found fathers would like to spend more time caring for their children, but working practices prevented this, an approach which led to Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper and Sparrow (2013) referring to men as ghosts in the organisational machine. While there may be a desire to change working practices at an individual level, organisations remain gendered perpetuating inequality between men and women (Kankkunen, 2014).

Bourdieu's (2001) *Masculine Domination* is criticised as representing a specifically situated notion of gender (Lovell, 2000; Wallace, 2003) that is both androcentric and outdated (Fowler, 2003). Bourdieu (2001) however, believed the objective structures of male domination observed amongst the Kabyle were applicable to a modern industrial society. Horizontal and vertical occupational segregation exemplifies continuing symbolic violence in the workplace with employment divisions being based on gender relations. The cultural arbitrary perpetuates masculine-based working practices as being the norm thus forming a gendered hierarchical order (Bourdieu,

2001). Through Bourdieu's structural constructivism approach, objective structures that determine practice have to be exposed and the subjective impact upon an individual analysed in order to fully understand social relations (Fowler, 1997), which is relevant to understanding continuing gender divisions. Adkins (2004) outlines one of the challenges women face when moving from the private sphere of home to the public sphere of the workplace is a lack of fit between a feminine habitus and the working practices which are traditionally based on male norms of behaviour. Since Bourdieu views habitus as a generative rather than determining principle (McNay, 2000), it does mean that the gender order in society has the potential to change. As more women enter the field of work, challenges are being made to working practices though the rate of change is considered to be still too slow if women are to achieve equality (Ritchie Allan, 2015).

### 2.7.2 Impact of Gender Inequalities

A consequence of occupational segregation is that overall women experience a pay differential to men with the median pay gap for full-time employees standing at 8.6% (ONS, 2018b). While this is a significant reduction from the 36.2% reported when the Equal Pay Act was introduced in 1970 (Perfect, 2011), totally removing the gap is proving difficult with Deloitte's (2016) predicting the gender pay differences will remain in the UK until 2069. In a recent move to publically highlight gender pay gaps at a company level, May's Conservative Government Gender Pay Gap Campaign (HM Government, 2017) requires all organisations with more than 250 staff to publish gender pay data from April 2018. Significant differences between male and female pay have been identified in a number of sectors, for example, financial services, retail and airlines to name just a few (Gov.uk, n.d.).

Contributory reasons are female dominated industries pay lower salaries than male dominated ones and men are more likely to occupy management positions in comparison to women. A pay gap is not always present as young women in full-time work earn similar or even slightly better wages than men, but change occurs as they age and experience the 'motherhood penalty' that usually effects their earnings (Fawcett Society, 2015.). The Equalities Review (2007 p66) similarly concluded "that there is one factor that above all leads to women's inequality in the labour market –

becoming mothers.” Lovejoy and Stone (2012) found women frequently do not return to their former careers due to their desire to fulfil the mothering role as well as a lack of flexibility in work arrangements that allows them to successfully combine family and organisational commitments. After having a family many women therefore elect, either voluntary or involuntary, to work part-time which disproportionately affects their opportunities (Salladarre & Hlaimi, 2014). In the UK 42% of working women are in part-time employment (ONS, 2018a) impacting further on the gender pay gap as a part-time hourly rates of pay are lower than those for full-time workers (ONS, 2017b). Metcalf (2009) associates a move to working part-time with occupational downgrading as jobs that are widely available on a part-time basis tend to be low-skilled with less responsibility allowing an employee to work a few hours at a time while still fulfilling the company requirements for the role.

Keating (2015) acknowledges that while progress has been made in terms of women entering the workplace further changes are required to achieve parity between men and women. Hochschild (1989) referred to gender equality as the “stalled revolution” and Friedman (2015) believes this is still the case a quarter of a century later. To gain equality Hochschild (1989) posits that cultural and structural barriers have to be challenged so that male and female roles at home and in the workplace are interchangeable.

Although Bourdieu does not explicitly address feminist theory in his work, his epistemology and methodological approach provide a framework that feminists can adopt to analyse gender and social relations (Adkins, 2004; McCall, 1992). The conceptual tools of habitus, field and capital allow for a flexible, nuanced understanding of gender that can be interpreted from both a feminine and masculine perspective (Thorpe, 2010). The continuing division between men and women is based on deeply embedded social constructions that perpetuate male domination in gender relations. While research is essential to expose and analyse these inequalities change will only take place when current beliefs are challenged and new practices accepted.

## 2.8 Ethnicity

The term ethnicity is used to refer to a group of people who collectively distinguish themselves from others based on a shared identity developed from a common ancestry, culture and language (Walters, 2012). Grosby (2015) further notes that religion, which is often linked to a particular ethnic group, also contributes to the formation of identity. Erikson (2010) emphasises that ethnicity is a lived social relationship where identity is formed through interactions with others with adolescence being a key time for becoming aware of ethnic influences. Fenton (1999) also considers ethnicity to be a social process with individuals developing and redefining the boundaries of their identity based on everyday practice and experiences. Since the UK is a diverse, multi-cultural society, Cohen (2006) posits that people often combine aspects of different cultures to form their identity. While Bennett et al. (2009) recognise that young people, particularly the highly educated, have developed an ability to negotiate between the national culture of the UK and cultural referents relating to their ethnic background. This is particularly relevant to children of migrants who can develop a cultural identity that reflects their heritage, for example, British Pakistani or British Chinese. Classifying people into social groups by their ethnicity perpetuates inequality since differentiating by cultural background serves as a mechanism of power with certain ethnic backgrounds dominating over others (Garner, Hancock & Budrys, 2013).

The term race also refers to grouping people together, but is based on shared physical characteristics such as skin colour and facial features (Foster, 2013). Wade (2015) posits that since the Second World War the term ethnicity has been preferred to race as the latter is considered to be problematic in terms of differentiating people biologically, with categorisation leading to certain groups being seen to have supremacy over others. Alexander and Knowles (2005 p2) believe that due to inequality of treatment the term race should still be used as it is a socially constructed category where people are grouped by “external ascription or an internal claiming of identity.” Additionally, Foster (2013) posits that grouping people together by race has social consequences and is therefore relevant to research on inequality.

Alexander and Knowles (2005) further discuss that British society has become increasingly racialised where lines of differentiation are drawn around groups of people

based on their race. Racialisation is the process of assigning a racial identity to a group of people, usually by others who are in a dominant position (Forrest & Dunn, 2013). Each racialised group is then ascribed socially constructed characteristics which impacts on how members are treated on a personal and institutional level with White British being in the most advantageous position (Garner & Selod, 2015). Racialisation, based on both physical and cultural traits, leads to practices of exclusion and structured inequalities in education and the workplace (Holck, 2016; McCluney, Schmitz, Hicken & Sonnega, 2018). Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma (1996) and Gill and Worley (2010) similarly believe that racialisation is deeply embedded in society making discrimination invisible and differences viewed to be the result of personal circumstances rather than structural inequality. While ethnicity and race are closely linked social constructs, in this thesis I will be focusing on ethnicity to encompass cultural practice in relation to the graduate labour market rather than physical traits more closely related to race.

In the UK, Bourdieu's work is predominantly associated with theorising class relations rather than ethnicity, though, analysis of the latter is present across his work (Puwar, 2009). His concurrent ethnographical studies in Algeria and Bearn influenced the development of his theory of practice (Wacquant, 2004) indicating the applicability of his tools to analyse different cultural settings. Go (2013) emphasises that Bourdieu's work in Algeria must be situated in a colonial context which he believed to be a system of domination with one country exerting power over another. Bourdieu also considered the disadvantage faced by immigrants in Paris in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu & Accordo, 1999) exploring their lives and lack of opportunity due to limited capital resources as a consequence of their ethnicity. There is however, a notable absence of discussions on ethnicity in *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984) due to French law at the time prohibiting surveys based on race and, therefore, possibly limiting analysis in this seminal work (Bennett et al., 2009). Bourdieu's work must therefore be set into the political and social context of the time recognising that even though he addresses ethnicity it was not a central research theme in comparison to the level of engagement with the topic today.

Bourdieu's approach to sociology, focusing on power and domination in social space, lends itself to discussions on ethnicity (Karner, 2007). Anthias (2001) posits that the failure to exhibit the correct cultural practices for a particular society leads to social



exclusion. Similarly to class and gender, ethnicity is a socially constructed phenomena leading to differentiation between groups of people when examining power relations and access to material resources (Ollivier, 2008). In the UK, the term ethnicity is usually associated with minority groups possessing a different ancestry and cultural identity to the White, indigenous population, though, Rollock (2014) points out that 'Whiteness' is also an ethnic identity that should be taken into consideration. She further believes that Bourdieu's work on cultural fit and the harmony of dispositions favours a White identity and contributes to their positions of power and authority while marginalising ethnic groups on the fringes of a field. Wallace's (2018) work similarly supports this point of view commenting that due to a lack of research on middle-class Black and ethnic minority groups, high-levels of cultural capital are associated with Whiteness. He found that middle-class Black and ethnic minority students are therefore misrepresented in the education system with assumptions incorrectly being made about their class identity and lack of cultural capital impacting upon their experience.

Frankenberg (1993 p1) describes Whiteness as 'a location of structural advantage' bestowing privilege and shaping cultural practices that provide a specific standpoint from which White people view society. Since the value of capital is specific to a field, Lo (2015) questions whether the dominated can be sufficiently reflexive and have the appropriate resources at their disposal to change their practice allowing them to progress and alter the current power relations in society. Rather than expecting different ethnic groups to conform to institutionalised White traditions, Lopes (2000) considers society should be more open-minded and accept a wider range of cultural practice.

Despite facing challenges ethnic minority groups remain aspirational. Tomlinson (2005) posits that migrant parents have embraced middle-class educational values believing qualifications to be important to overcome disadvantage and improve employment opportunities. While their school results tend to be lower, proportionally a greater number of ethnic minority students enter higher education than their White peers with White working-class students being the least likely group of all to attend university (Crawford & Greaves, 2015). Ethnic background influences the nature of engagement with higher education. Tatlow (2015) found a quarter of ethnic minority entrants clustered in just 30 modern universities where students are likely to be the

first generation in their family to attend. In addition, Boliver's (2016) research exploring reasons for ethnic minority under-representation at Russell group universities identified inequalities in the admissions process. Her findings were based on two factors; firstly, ethnic minority students were most likely to apply for popular courses, notably medicine and law, therefore numerically reducing their chance of obtaining a place. Secondly, evidence also exists of admissions tutors rejecting ethnic minority students at a higher rate than White students to maintain a balanced diversity on a course in relation to the overall representation of ethnic minority groups in the population. In defence of the low number of ethnic minority students at Oxford, Mapstone (2010) argues that rather than being excluded due to their ethnicity, these students are less likely to meet the academic entry criteria as their performance at A-level is weaker.

Shiner and Noden (2015) believe university admittance based on meritocratic achievement masks socio-economic inequalities in the education system. Overall, ethnic minority results are lower, but controlling for class and, therefore, socio-economic differences at A-level, Jackson (2012) found a complex pattern of achievement. Indian and Chinese students performed better than the White majority of students, but other ethnic groups performed at a much lower level. Poorer performance among ethnic minorities is therefore not solely due to economic inequalities with Heath and Brinbaum (2007) suggesting there is a cultural element to their results. Privileged groups transfer their cultural capital to their children to maintain dominant positions and, accompanied by the institutional habitus of the college, students are clearly steered towards universities based on their class and ethnicity. At a school level, Reay et al.'s (2007) research indicates that White middle-class pupils attending a multi-ethnic school, experience privilege over their friends from different ethnic backgrounds in terms of higher grades and access to opportunities. Focusing on a selective school, Collins, Collins and Butt (2015) posit the education system promotes social reproduction rather than social mobility as ethnic minority and socially disadvantaged pupils perform worse than White pupils from wealthier parts of the city. Simply accessing education does not improve life chances. Analysing labour force data, Li (2015) concluded that education alone is insufficient to ward off unemployment as ethnic minority graduates are more likely to be unemployed in comparison to White students.

Hagelskamp, Suarez-Orozco and Hughes (2010) posit improved education and work opportunities are key reasons for migration yet ethnicity is widely associated with inequality affecting experiences of health, housing, education and particularly employment (Platt, 2011). Heath and Cheung (2006) refer to this as the ethnic penalty in comparison to the native population. Data from the Department for Work and Pensions (2015) reported an employment rate of 61.4% amongst ethnic minorities in comparison to 73% for the total population. Nilsson and Wrench (2009) identify an ability to speak the native language as having a crucial impact upon job opportunities. Focusing her research on second generation minorities and the effect of parental class of origin, Zuccotti (2015) found that employment outcomes varied significantly between different ethnic groups. Indians performed better than White natives in improving their social position in comparison to their parent's social class, while Caribbean and Pakistani men continued to experience the same disadvantage as their immigrant parents. White middle-class children continue to dominate in society, though, by utilising their parent's resources to achieve educational success (Crozier, Reay & James, 2011) that subsequently impacts on employment opportunities. Disadvantage based on ethnicity is clearly nuanced and complex with experiences varying depending upon background.

Integrating ethnic groups into the labour market is important for their personal and financial success as well as contributing to the wider economy. While second generation immigrants may improve on their parent's position, Algan, Dustmann, Glitz and Manning's (2010) research indicates they still receive lower wages on average than the native population. One challenge often facing ethnic minority groups, and particularly immigrants, is their limited knowledge of the labour market rules (Bauder, 2005) affecting their ability to secure higher-level employment. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 p119) refer to this as 'informational capital'; a component of cultural capital encompassing knowledge and understanding. Morosanu (2016) therefore recommends immigrants build strong bridging ties with natives to improve their social networks and help them understand how to advance their occupational status. She does recognise that this is a slow and complex process that is not easily accessible to all.

Recognising structural inequalities in the labour market Shah, Dwyer and Modood (2010) observed middle-class Pakistani parents generating their own social capital for

their children through using successful family and ethnic friends to provide role models and access to work experience. However, these networks are not available to working-class Pakistani children who continue to be disadvantaged even when they are successful at school. Focusing their research on the Black Caribbean community, Rollock, Vincent, Gillborn and Ball (2012) found that those successfully gaining professional jobs were reluctant to identify themselves with having achieved the accompanying middle-class status. They associated middle class with Whiteness and felt that by identifying themselves as middle class they lost important values from their Black Caribbean heritage. Accessing higher status jobs therefore may bring economic capital, but not necessarily the cultural capital to feel comfortable within a particular field.

The relationship between culture and ethnicity is complex with inequality being experienced in both education and employment. Analysing Labour Government employment policies from 1997-2010, Phung (2011) concluded they had limited impact on improving the situation for ethnic minority groups due to multiple interconnected factors including geographical deprivation, lack of social capital and discrimination in the labour market. Similarly in education, despite a political commitment to education for all and the recognition of its importance in removing social inequality, ethnic minority pupils continue to be disadvantaged and underperform relative to the majority population (Alexander, Weekes-Bernard & Arday, 2015). Platt (2011) concludes that inequality due to structural constraints challenges an individual's ability to exert their agency leading to cycles of disadvantage and domination. Engagement and success are clearly influenced by ethnic origin with outcomes varying significantly between different groups. Overall though, students from ethnic minority backgrounds face more barriers to achieving academic and employment success in comparison to the White majority population.

## 2.9 Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) first used the phrase intersectionality, positing that by separating feminist and racial critiques into single categories the multi-dimensional experience and burden faced by Black women was not being fully addressed. Evaluating on a single axis does not capture the complexity of social lives as disadvantage is

cumulative with class, gender and ethnicity operating in combination to influence individual outcomes. Intersectionality, initially rooted in feminist theory, has therefore now broadened to include other forms of inequality (Squires, 2009). For example, Levant, Gerdes, Jadaszewski and Alto (2018) found that, through the intersection of ethnicity and masculinity, father's with excessive hopes for achievement impacted negatively on their son's emotions.

Bourdieu (1984) himself recognised the double domination of working-class women, affected by both their gender and social position. While Bradley (1996) refers to the triple disadvantage of race, sex and class. Using multiple dimensions to analyse the intersection of difference and structural inequality in people's lives is complex, but essential to understand inter-group and intra-group experiences in society (McBride, Hebson & Holgate, 2015). For example, Skeggs (1997) work focused on the gendered experiences of working-class women. While Crompton and Lyonette's (2011) research on women in the middle-class professions of accountancy and medicine found their career trajectories were limited in comparison to men as they still shouldered the domestic responsibility even if they did not complete the tasks themselves.

Attitudes and experiences also differ depending on an individual's ethnic background indicating a cultural dimension to life experiences (Zuccotti, 2015). For example, Evans and Bowlby (2000) found Muslim Pakistani women face challenges in the workplace not only based on their gender, but also their ethnicity, often adopting practices that are at odds with their culture in order to succeed (Van Laar, Derks and Ellemers, 2013). Rauf and Mitra (2016) believe that searching for a cultural and religious fit has led to the increase in female Muslim entrepreneurs as they can influence their working environment. Additionally, Alexander and Wezel (2011) found that increasing levels of education and participation in the workplace had altered young Muslim women's relationships in the home with them being subject to reduced patriarchal influence.

Complementing Bourdieu's approach to social positioning, Phoenix and Pattynama (2006) consider intersectionality to be a relational approach that allows a rich analysis of power relations within activities that are central to everyday lives. McCall (2005), recognising the complexity of studying multiple intersecting variables, posits that social life is too complex to reduce into single overarching categories particularly as each

one has its own logic to organising difference and, therefore, recommends careful consideration when selecting methodological approaches. In contrast, Platt (2011) warns against individualisation and the breaking down of factors to the extent that useful groupings cannot be identified to provide meaningful analysis. Corlett and Mavin (2014) believe intersectionality plays an important role in the development of individual identities with Nash (2008 p2) referring to intersectionality as the 'gold standard' in terms of adopting a multidisciplinary approach to analysing oppression and disadvantage. Personal factors therefore influence social experiences, an approach that is central to the work of Bourdieu. Habitus, focusing upon individual trajectories, acknowledges that background impacts upon life opportunities. A Bourdieusian approach can therefore be used to analyse multiple disadvantages in both education and employment by positioning individuals in social space based on their holdings of relevant capital. Intersectionality is a crucial consideration in this thesis as the research is based upon the class, gender and ethnicity of participants recognising that these factors influence in combination.

## 2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has established that while growth in higher education has led to a more qualified population, deep-seated inequalities persist based on class, gender and ethnicity. These factors have been conceptualised to identify potential disadvantage before considering their cumulative effect through intersectionality. Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field have been used to evaluate education and employment outcomes indicating that those holding capital relevant to the field maintain dominant positions. For the disadvantaged improving their situation is difficult and the aim of improving social mobility through education has had a limited effect. Education and employment in the UK therefore remain structured fields that lead to inequality. Education is dominated by White, middle-class children, though, an increasingly complex pattern of participation and success is emerging based on ethnicity as population diversity increases in the UK. Additionally, the workplace is dominated by White, middle-class men who hold positions of power and authority in leading institutions. The next chapter discusses the term employability, an approach used in the higher education sector to overcome inequality barriers by preparing

students for employment to secure graduate-level jobs that reflect the level of their qualifications.

## **Chapter Three – Employability and the Graduate Labour Market**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The transition from education to the workplace presents a time of change for an individual. Class, gender, ethnicity and other social identities influence both academic achievements and employment outcomes with experiences of entering the job market varying depending upon personal circumstances. In recent years the massification of higher education has impacted upon graduate employment patterns with a high-level job upon graduation no longer being guaranteed simply due to holding a degree (Tomlinson, 2008). In a competitive job market graduates are expected to demonstrate a wide range of abilities and attributes that are associated with the term employability. The aim of this chapter is to explore the concept of employability and consider its role in the transition from higher education to employment. The field of graduate employment will also be discussed to establish the context of the transition. Factors that influence employability will be considered as well as the development of a graduate identity to facilitate the transition from education to the workplace.

### **3.2 Defining Employability**

The Dearing Report from the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing, 1997) established the link between employability and higher education, emphasising the role of universities in developing individuals able to access high-skilled jobs for personal gain as well as contributing towards an advanced global economy. Since its publication the report has influenced policy and practice in higher education, leading universities to placing employability on their strategic agenda. With fee rises, potential students and parents are increasingly interested in employment outcomes upon the completion of studies, an interest that has been fuelled by the publication of the Key Information Set of data (BIS, 2011) that simplifies comparisons between courses and institutions. The data incorporates the annual DLHE survey which gathers information on graduates six months after completing their studies to ascertain whether or not they are in employment, and if so, the level of work and salary. The DLHE data also records postgraduate study as a positive outcome as a degree is a prerequisite for entry which is an important inclusion from a university perspective as increasing numbers of students are immediately continuing onto



higher-level study (Prospects, 2017). It must be noted that emphasis is placed on the DLHE data as it is a measureable outcome after university. Kalfa and Taksa (2015) posit that such performance measures have led to managerialism within the higher education sector, further fuelling the debate on employability. Employment however, is a different term and should not be confused with employability (Bridgstock, 2009) as the latter is more complex and cannot simply be measured by whether or not you are in work.

Employability is often believed to be a relatively recent word due to its more frequent usage starting in the 1990's. However, its origins can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Gazier (1999) charts the development of the term employability from a simplistic differentiation between those who are able or unable to work to the more complex notion of an individual engaging with their own characteristics in relation to employment opportunities. More contemporary notions of employability from Gazier (1999 p40) include initiative and interactive employability. Initiative employability is the "marketability of cumulative individual skills based on human and social capital with a focus for individual's being responsible for their own employability". While interactive employability is defined as "the relative capacity of an individual to achieve meaningful employment given interaction between personal characteristics and the labour market".

Based on the above, initiative and interactive employability both resonate with recent academic debate. Despite significant literature being written on the subject employability remains a contested concept with no single agreed definition, as demonstrated by the range of frequently cited quotes considered below. Firstly, Yorke (2006 p8) defines the term as:

'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes  
- that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful  
in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce,  
the community and the economy.'

This definition recognises that employability benefits not only the individual, but also makes a wider contribution to the economic well-being of society. One criticism of the above definition is the word occupation implies a career spent in one industry when in reality there is increasing flexibility in the workplace (Watts, 2006). Hall (1976) first

proposed the concept of a protean career where an individual, operating independently and with self-direction, links a number of job roles together across their working life to develop a successful career. Wyszominski and Chang (2017) found protean careers are particularly relevant in the creative art industry as graduates tend to operate on an individualistic basis in small companies. Employability is therefore a key factor in building a successful career as it allows an individual to move between organisations and industries developing their job role and opportunities.

The 'Working towards your Future' report by the CBI (2011) focuses on graduate employability by encouraging students to maximise the benefits of their time at university to enhance their future opportunities. Their report defines employability as follows:

'The terms 'employability' or 'employability skills' refer to a set of generic softer skills and competencies. In particular, personal attributes that can be summed up as a positive attitude are critical to being employable. A positive attitude encapsulates characteristics such as willingness to take part and openness to new activities and ideas.'

(CBI, 2011 p12)

Employer-based definitions tend to focus on skills and abilities to secure employment while academic ones consider a broader range of outcomes including personal development and fulfilment (Bridgstock, 2009). Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) definition bears similarities to those above in recognising employability is a combination of factors. However, they note that employability is not simply securing work, but being satisfied in a role which is important when building a career and feeling a sense of achievement from work.

"Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful.'

(Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007 p280)

Employability is commonly associated with the development of skills using terms such as 'generic' or 'transferable' to recognise a range of skills relevant to the workplace regardless of subject discipline. To add to the terminology skills can also be referred to as core skills, key skills, basic skills and essential skills with numeracy, literacy and ICT being recognised as important by all. These skills should be developed from an early age to be at a sufficiently high level for eventual transference to the workplace

(Miller, Biggart & Newton, 2013). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) sets national standards for higher education and requires all courses to incorporate skills into the curriculum reiterating the importance of skill development for graduates (QAA, n.d.). In a review of skills in relation to global prosperity, Leitch (2006) recommended that the UK needed to develop a highly skilled workforce to remain a competitive economy while simultaneously reducing social inequality since skills allow access to employment.

There is no definitive list of employability skills, adding to the complexity of what employability actually is. However, communication, problem solving, team work, negotiation and organisational skills are typically referred to in the literature and are examples of those recommended by the CBI (2014) as being essential for the workplace. James, Warhurst, Tholen and Commander (2013, p953) differentiate between graduate skills that are typically acquired at university and the 'skills of graduates' that are acquired from wider experience in life. Personal background has a significant impact upon wider experience with middle-class students being able to mobilise their social and cultural capital to further enhance their skills in comparison to working-class students, and therefore strengthen their position in the job market (Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013). Hinchliffe and Jolly's (2011) research proposed that businesses are less interested in technical skills upon appointment as these can be developed within the workplace. Instead, they look for softer, people orientated skills during recruitment since these tend to be inherent within an individual and cannot easily be taught. Senior and Cubbidge (2010) support this point of view that soft skills rather than technical skills are more highly regarded amongst graduates, an approach which tends to advantage middle-class students.

Skills are an essential part of employability, however, other factors should also be taken into consideration when defining the term. The following definition adopts a broader perspective:

'Employability is more than about developing attributes, techniques or experience just to enable a student to get a job, or to progress within a current career. It is about learning and the emphasis is less on 'employ' and more on 'ability'. In essence, the emphasis is on developing critical reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner.'

(Harvey, 2003 cited in Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac & Lawton, 2012 p4)

Learning to learn is therefore an essential component of employability (Brewer, 2013) as it allows students to engage with their personal and professional development. Employability initiatives are most effective when individuals understand the specific learning and development they are gaining and are able to apply it to different situations. An ability to learn is also sought by employers since they require new recruits to adapt and develop within an organisational context.

Attributes is another term associated with employability extending it beyond the possession of skills. In this context, attributes also include personal characteristics that are viewed as desirable by an employer such as honesty, integrity and a high level of motivation. Pegg et al. (2012) recommend a broad approach towards employability citing values, intellectual rigour and engagement as also being relevant. Personal attributes, though they are similar, should be differentiated from graduate attributes. Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell and Watts (2001) refer to graduate attributes as the expected knowledge, skills and abilities gained from studying at university. These attributes should be present in all graduates regardless of discipline and include research skills, critical thinking, personal effectiveness and professional understanding (Barrie, 2012).

Graduate attributes do contribute towards employability (McCabe, 2010), but they also relate to additional experience gained from being at university. Research by the Sutton Trust (2014) indicates that extracurricular activities enhance holdings of cultural capital by widening knowledge and extending skills beyond those gained in the classroom. In turn, these additional extracurricular experiences have a positive impact on academic results and careers. Clark, Marsden, Whyatt, Thompson and Walker (2015) found that students enhanced their employability through extracurricular activities, positing that the key to success was not just participation, but an ability to articulate to potential employers the skills and learning gained from these activities. An and Western's (2019) research further establishes the link between participation in extracurricular activities and the development of cultural capital. They found that extracurricular activities enhance soft skills, such as negotiation, teamwork and self-reliance; all of which are highly sought after by employers as they can be transferred to different situations in the workplace allowing staff to be flexible and adaptable (Hinchliffe & Jolly,

2011). Brown and Hesketh (2004) therefore, consider soft skills to be a form of cultural capital that improves an individual's employability.

In addition, volunteering is highly regarded by employers, though, Dean's (2016) research indicates that middle-class students are more likely to volunteer due to personal values aligning to organisational values. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014c) found that students living on campus have a higher-level of involvement in extracurricular activities. This could lead to class differences as the Sutton Trust (2018) discovered working-class students are more likely to live at home and work part-time (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008) to financially support themselves, therefore, limiting their opportunity to access beneficial university-based employability enhancing activities. Cashmore (2017) posits that rising fees have been a contributory factor in the increase of commuter students while Marsh (2014) found students preferred to stay at home to benefit from family support networks.

Graduates tend to focus on employability in relation to gaining their first job upon finishing university, failing to recognise its long-term impact for career progression (Tymon, 2013). Hillage and Pollard (1998) posit that employability is an ongoing process if individuals are to be employed throughout their lifetime. Watts (2006) differentiates between immediate employment, immediate employability and sustainable employability, arguing there is a difference between a graduate finding a job upon finishing university to them being employable and building a long-term career by successfully moving between roles as required. With contemporary society, and therefore the working environment, constantly changing becoming a life-long learner is essential to continually enhance individual employability, ensuring skill levels are maintained and updated to meet the demands of business (Haasler, 2013).

The overarching social expectation is that being employable is the responsibility of the individual (Williams, Dodd, Steele & Randall, 2015). Smith (2010), considering the role of human, social and cultural capital in relation to employability, recognises that success in the contemporary economy is not equally accessible to all. The definitions above imply acquiring the relevant skills and knowledge makes an individual employable, but developing employability while at university is a two-way process and cannot solely be driven through the curriculum and forced upon a person. Morrison

(2019) believes that this supply-side approach to employability also ignores the role of the labour market as it is organisations that appoint individuals with roles not always being fairly distributed in terms of class, gender and ethnicity.

In terms of an individual enhancing their own employability, Tomlinson (2008) found that middle-class students, in response to increasing competition in the job market, purposively developed their wider credentials. While Stuart, Lido, Morgan, Solomon and May's (2011) research indicates that working class and ethnic minority widening participation students are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities that are considered valuable by employers. Developing employability while at university is not a simple process that can be equally applied to all students. Working-class students who are already facing disadvantage in society are more likely to face barriers that potentially further disadvantage them in comparison to middle-class students (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). For example, they are more likely to work part-time alongside their studies to support themselves financially, therefore, limiting their time to become involved in employability enhancing extracurricular activities.

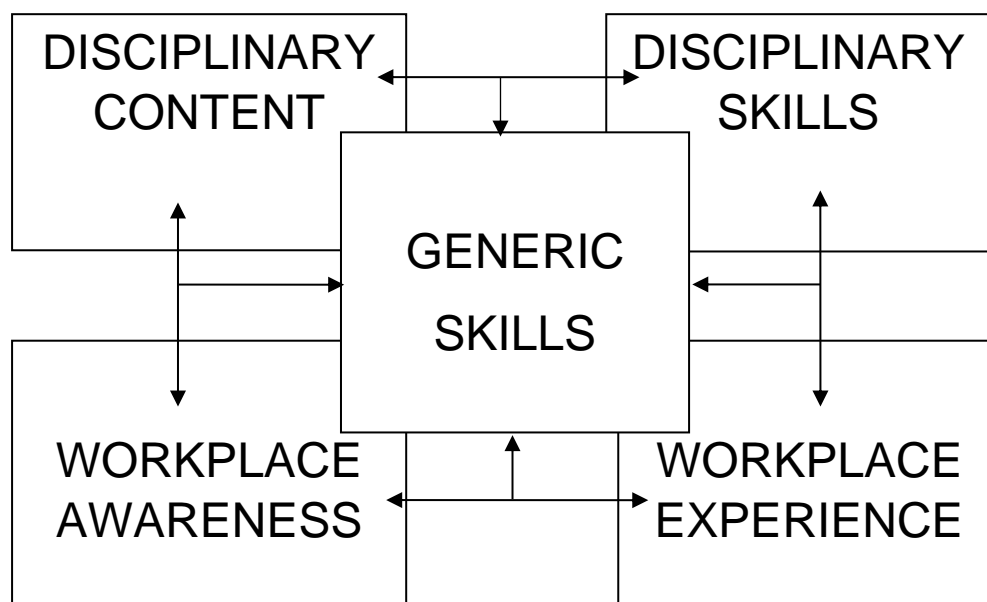
To summarise, employability is a multi-faceted construct encompassing a wide range of concepts. It combines academic knowledge and intelligence with key skills for the subject area as well as softer personal skills that can be transferred to the working environment (Yorke & Knight, 2006). A broad approach to employability will be adopted in this research recognising the importance of skills, abilities and attributes as well as the influence of personal background factors. Due to fee rises, a competitive job market and published employment statistics employability has become a key strategic target for universities requiring a structured, coherent approach at a number of levels to be effective. In the next section I consider models of employability that can be used in higher education.

### 3.3 Models of Employability

The concept of employability requires translation into a working model to demonstrate how skills and attributes are actually acquired. The models presented here are in chronological order to show the development from earlier skills-based models to more recent ones incorporating a wider range of attributes and abilities.

Earlier models, proposed after Dearing's (1997) recommendations for higher education, focused on the development of skills, a view of employability that is now considered to be relatively narrow. Bennett, Dunne and Carré's (1999) model of course provision in Figure 3.1 incorporates the role of core and generic skills within the curriculum. In contrast to the wider usage of the terms, they used core to refer to disciplinary specific skills and generic for transferable skills that are relevant across subjects. It must be noted that skills are viewed subjectively depending upon the discipline (Wikle & Fagin, 2015) since those that are considered core in one area may be generic in another. Taking an integrated approach, the model posits that generic skills should be developed across a course incorporating disciplinary knowledge and skills with an understanding of their operation within the relevant industry. Despite recognising the value of the workplace in course provision, the model does not acknowledge the wider opportunities for developing employability outside the course (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). There is also no acknowledgement of the influence of a student's personal background circumstances, such as ethnicity, gender or social class that are present in an unequal society, and could impact upon their performance and skill development (Belt, Drake & Chapman, 2010).

Figure 3.1 A Model of Course Provision



(Bennett et al., 1999, p80)

Building on Bennett et al.'s (1999) skills-based approach, Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) developed the CareerEDGE model, shown in Figure 3.2, with the aim of being accessible to a wider audience. Taking a broader approach towards employability, the model identifies a greater breadth of components including work and life experience. Potentially affected by individual background factors, work and life experience can be subjective and influenced by an individual student's structure of opportunity. To overcome personal factors universities should offer opportunities to develop experience that are equally accessible to all, though, frequently students who would benefit most do not avail themselves of the opportunity therefore reinforcing inequality of employment outcomes (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). The CareerEDGE model is multi-stage, recognising that employability is a developmental process requiring students to engage with a range of activities at university before reflecting on how these lead to them being employable. While acknowledging the comprehensiveness of the CareerEDGE model, Small, Shacklock and Marchant (2018) comment that it does not include interpersonal skills which Hogan et al. (2013) found to be increasingly important in graduate recruitment as organisations look for employees who are interpersonally compatible and have a good social fit with existing members of staff.



Figure 3.2 The Essential Components of Employability

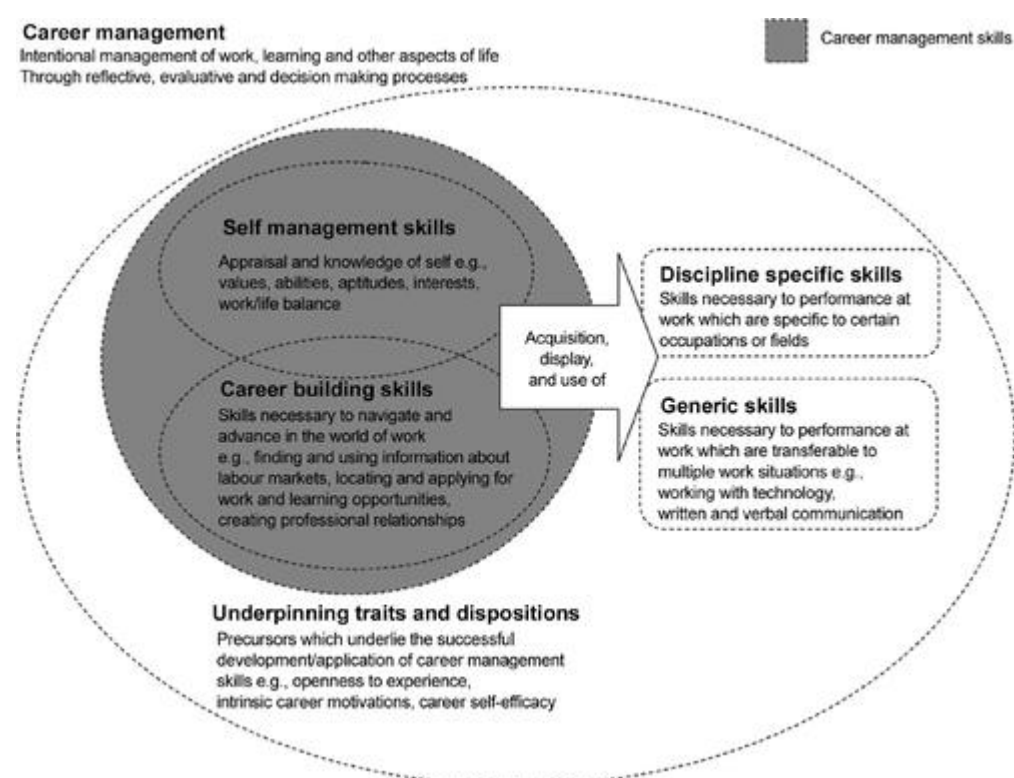


(Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007, p280)

The next model presented in Figure 3.3 is Bridgstock's (2009) model of graduate attributes for employability. Similarly, it incorporates discipline specific and generic skills, but believing these are insufficient on their own, the model emphasises the importance of career management skills for graduates. Bridgstock posits that career management skills are essential in a modern competitive economy allowing students to negotiate their entry into the workforce and subsequently develop a career. Career management skills include self-awareness of strengths, weaknesses and values that inform career identity alongside career-building skills to gather information on how to gain entry and advance in a particular industry (Bridgstock, 2011). Okay-Somerville and Scholaris (2017) found that engaging with career management skills was the most important factor in improving employability. However, Greenbank and Hepworth's (2008) research indicated that working-class students are poorly informed on career decision-making and also are the least likely group of students to voluntarily attend the careers service for advice. Based on first-generation university students, Pasero's (2016) research also focused on engagement with careers advisors finding they were

less likely to use the services available. As first-generation students are more likely to be working-class this furthers their disadvantage when looking for graduate work. Finally, career management skills are also important from a societal point of view as well as an individual one (Gillie & Gillie Isenhour, 2003) by ensuring that people are matched to job roles appropriate for their skills and abilities thus improving work efficiency to benefit the wider economy.

Figure 3.3 Conceptual Model of Graduate Attributes for Employability including Career Management Skills



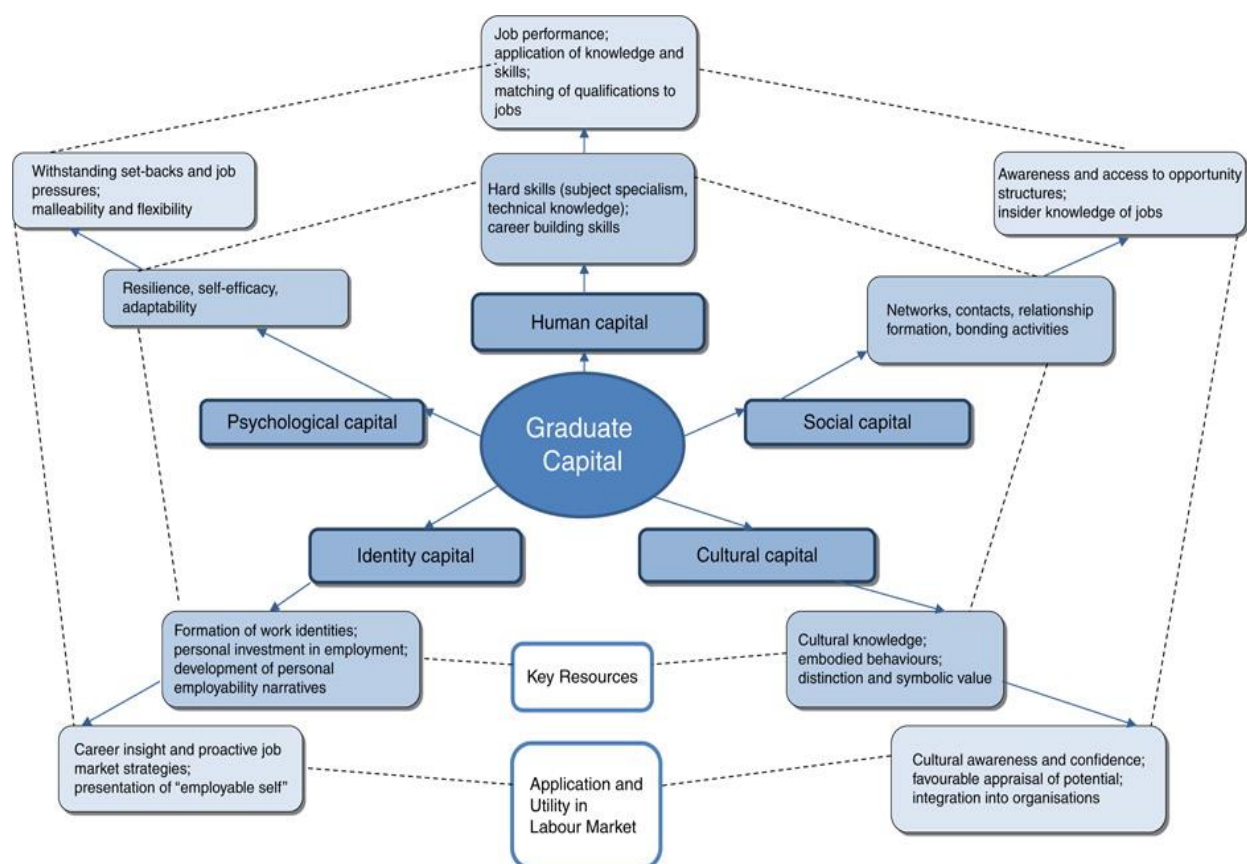
(Bridgstock, 2009 p 36)

The graduate attributes model is underpinned by personal qualities where an individual maximises their potential by having the traits and characteristics to engage with their personal employability. Since acquiring a university education is associated with being middle class (Loveday, 2015) the attributes underpinning the models of employability could be considered to represent middle-class values, potentially favouring one group of students over another. Middle-class students are likely to

already inherently possess attributes that can be enhanced through employability initiatives while working-class students may have to fundamentally question and alter their attitudes and beliefs to successfully enter graduate employment (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006).

Finally, Tomlinson's (2017) Graduate Capital Model posits that rather than the development of transferable skills employability should be considered through the accumulation and deployment of five forms of capital. Acquired through formal and informal experiences, graduates are then required to construct their personal value in relation to the labour market. Recognising that disadvantaged students can find it more difficult to construct their employability Tomlinson suggests that careers support could help them to positively frame their experiences.

Figure 3.4 Graduate Capital Model



(Tomlinson, 2017 p340)

Tomlinson's (2017) model offers a more contemporary notion of employability in terms of capital holdings. Identifying capital as a resource, he views employability as a relational concept where students with high holdings of capital are placed at an advantage when entering the labour market providing they can effectively deploy the different forms of capital to their benefit. All of the remaining models assume students have an equal chance of engaging with the process, though, Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) model does acknowledge that wider life experience contributes to employability. However, it does not recognise that individual circumstances affect opportunity and the nature of the experience gained.

The concept of employability is intended to place the ability to be successful in the hands of the individual implying that everyone can achieve high-level outcomes if they follow the process (Herr, 2001). Wilton (2011) however, believes the discourse on employability has actually increased social injustice as placing responsibility with the individual ignores structural barriers allowing the advantaged to continue dominating the graduate labour market. For example, Garner's (2011) work indicated that members of the White British working class had a stronger attachment to their local community than the middle class meaning they were more likely look for work close to home. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) adopt a broad approach in their framework identifying that personal circumstances have a structural impact upon an individual's employability, and suggest that policy should focus on barriers to work rather than just developing skills relevant to employment. Martinez-Roca, Martinez and Pineda (2015) support this, positing that internal and external factors must be taken into account when providing careers information as focusing on personal circumstances means advice can be tailored to support individual achievement.

Over the last twenty years employability has become a key focus for higher education with a number of models proposing a range of approaches for developing graduate employability. Simpler models focus on skills, pedagogy and curriculum development whereas more complex ones recognise the need for skills, abilities and experiences including elements that may only be gained outside the classroom or are possibly inherent within the individual. Employability is a social construct that remains highly individualised for each graduate (Kalfa & Taksa, 2015) with personal and social background factors contributing towards differing employment outcomes. Simply acquiring skills while at university is insufficient for employment success. Students

need to be able to transfer their skills to the field of work which can be difficult for those lacking the relevant cultural capital meaning that graduates who are already disadvantaged in the workplace are more likely to find this problematical.

In summary, models such as the ones discussed above do map graduate employability, visually presenting key elements to help students and practitioners understand the process. The models also demonstrate employability is a complex combination of skills, attributes and abilities that have to be recognised and reflected upon by an individual graduate in order to target their chosen career. However, the models do not accommodate structural barriers to employability. In reality due to personal and societal circumstances, graduates do not have an equal ability to assert their agency in relation to graduate employment with those from a disadvantaged background finding it more difficult to secure appropriate employment (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006).

### 3.4 The Role of Graduate Employability

The previous chapter established that higher education is considered an essential driver in improving employment opportunities, though, significant inequalities remain based on class, gender and ethnicity (Boden & Nedeva, 2010). Traditionally, education alone was considered to be sufficient for occupational success and prosperity (Tholen, 2013), but with an increase in the number of graduates and a competitive job market many students fail to fulfil their career ambitions (Porter, 2014) leading to underemployment in roles that do not require a degree (Nunley, Pugh, Romero & Seals, 2017). To support students, most institutions have developed strategies that adopt a multi-faceted approach to employability offering a range of curricular and extracurricular opportunities (Cole & Tibby, 2013). Su (2014) recommends adopting a person-based, as opposed to a system-based, approach to developing graduate attributes to address the needs of the individual and accommodate personal circumstances.

Cranmer (2006) however, questions the effectiveness of purely classroom-based employability models positing that employers should take more responsibility by contributing to curriculum delivery and offering work experience. While being employable is important for individual students to secure a job it also has wider

implications for business and society to ensure a supply of appropriately skilled staff. Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters and De Witte (2014) discuss a three-tier approach to employability recognising the initial macro-level societal approach has moved through the meso-level, with organisations focusing on employee abilities to maintain a competitive advantage, to the current micro-level where the responsibility for employability lies with the individual. With work experience being explicit in both Bennett et al.'s (1999) and Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) models, business clearly has a role to play in graduate employability as students require access to opportunities if they are to develop work-based skills. Work experience can be gained through part-time work, unpaid internships or placements taken in conjunction with academic study. On particular vocational degrees, such as nursing, placements are compulsory to meet professional training standards within the industry (Ewertson, Bagga-Gupta, Allvin & Blomberg, 2017). While in the creative arts industry they are essential for networking in an industry-specific context (Daniel & Daniel, 2013; Lee, 2011). Brooks and Youngson (2016) found that a twelve-month sandwich placement had a positive impact on graduate employment outcomes in terms of the level of work and starting salary as it allowed students to gain structured work experience while studying. Helyer and Lee (2014) similarly advocate the importance of work experience for improving employability particularly if it forms part of a long-term career plan (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). For those with little or no work experience involvement in extracurricular activities such as clubs, societies or voluntary organisations can compensate. Thompson, Clark, Walker and Whyatt (2013) advise that students should be more strategic in their choice of activity and level of involvement if they wish to use it to develop and demonstrate their employability.

McCowan (2015) concludes that while universities have a role to play in graduate employability as chronologically, for many, it is the last educational institution attended prior to working, higher education institutions cannot be entirely responsible and other parts of society must also offer support. Veld, Semejin and Vuuren (2015) believe employability should be shared between organisations and individuals. The University Alliance (2014b) found that while employers would like to recruit job-ready graduates, joint initiatives between universities and businesses have led to improved job opportunities for students from a wider range of backgrounds as they are able to gain access to organisations that can later lead to employment. Graduates from a

disadvantaged background may require more support to successfully complete the transition from education to work as their careers knowledge is limited (Martinez-Roca et al., 2015) and they are unaware of the steps and experience required to gain access to particular jobs. Heagney and Benson (2017) posit that mature students similarly require additional support as they tend to lack confidence in their abilities, though, Ali (2016) found that they were more likely to seek professional advice than younger students while at university.

Career decision making is a key element of employability as it allows individuals to target specific fields. Careers advisers can play a critical role in supporting decision making, not only in terms of providing information on job roles, but also the education and training required in order to access specific career paths (National Careers Service, n.d.). Holman (2014) believes careers advisers provide a crucial interface between the education system and the world of work, and every young person should receive personal guidance from a trained adviser at least twice by the age of 18 to help them explore career opportunities. Schools have a statutory duty to provide careers guidance, though Long and Hubble (2019) report this duty is not always effectively fulfilled. Advice is meant to be impartial, or neutral, to provide young people with the knowledge and skills to self-manage their careers and to accommodate their personal abilities and preferences. The Department for Education (2018) believes impartial guidance will raise aspirations and motivate young people towards fulfilling their personal ambitions. While not compulsory in the higher education sector, universities also provide extensive careers services on the same principle of being impartial (Long & Hubble, 2019). However, Slaney (2013) believes it is difficult for young people to make career decisions independently as their rational decision making ability is not always fully developed and they still, therefore, require specific guidance and support.

Lane (2013) believes a fundamental issue is that the UK education system requires key career decisions at too young an age. This is supported by Haynes, McCrone and Wade (2013) who believe careers provision for 14-19 year olds is inadequate to support the early decisions with many struggling to decide which degree to study (Noaman, Luna, Ragab & Ventura, 2016). Kenny and Medvide (2013) and Ginevra, Nota and Ferrari (2015) posit that early parental support is crucial in career decision making as it helps students to navigate opportunities, though, Adegoke (2014) warns

this is only effective if parents are well-informed. To resolve this, Acquah, Limmer and Malpass (2017) recommend that careers information and guidance in schools should be delivered in conjunction with parents as it would provide a more effective mechanism for sharing information on available opportunities to a whole family and therefore, support the development of young people's interests in a wider range of careers. They further found that young people would welcome more information and guidance on careers than they are currently able to access. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) recognise that the concept of employability has the potential to improve social inclusion for disadvantaged groups, but it should be set into a broad framework incorporating individual factors and personal circumstances as well as external factors such as labour market conditions and organisational procedures. Misra and Mishra's (2011) interactionist view posits that employability is a combination of the person, their skills and the demands of the labour market. Subjective employability refers to an individual's ability to secure work while objective employability relates to the structure of the labour market (Hetty van Emmerik, Schreurs, De Cuyper, Jawahar & Peeters, 2012). Employability models tend to focus on a subjective approach as individuals have the ability to take action whereas labour market conditions are beyond their control. Simply acquiring skills and attributes will not necessarily secure employment though. While Bridgstock's (2009) model incorporates career management skills, beginning to recognise the importance of engaging with the job market, none of the models discussed take into account structural disadvantage that can affect an individual's opportunity to gain appropriate graduate-level work. Despite holding the requisite qualifications for entry to the labour market, graduates are not able to exert their agency in an equal manner with personal circumstances continuing to impact on opportunities.

### 3.5 The Graduate Recruitment Process

Graduate employment refers to a position where a degree is a pre-requisite for appointment to the role. To secure a job students have to successfully pass a number of recruitment processes, which vary depending on the organisation and the sector. Graduate schemes, usually offered by the large recruiters, are considered highly desirable due to their structured training and opportunities for career progression (Targetjobs, n.d.a). According to The Times (2017) Top 100 Graduate Employers



survey leading organisations include PwC, Aldi, IBM, Teach First, Unilever and Lloyds Banking Group. Recruitment for these schemes is multi-stage due to the high number of applications they receive, allowing them to reduce the volume to a manageable number for the final decision-making activities. In addition, many organisations require applicants to have achieved a minimum number of UCAS points prior to entering university, adding further barriers to graduate recruitment and penalising those who may have performed poorly at college, but improved since.

A review of graduate recruitment processes taken from company websites in 2018 is summarised in Table 3.1. This indicates the complexity of the process and the number of stages a student has to pass through before being offered employment.

Table 3.1 The Graduate Recruitment Process

<b>PwC</b>	<b>Aldi</b>	<b>IBM</b>	<b>Teach First</b>	<b>Unilever</b>	<b>Lloyds</b>
Online application	Online application	Online application	Online application	Online application	Online application
Psychometric tests	Psychometric tests	Online tests	Assessment Centre	Online tests	Online tests
First interview (phone)	5 minute video 'Who am I'	Interview	Skills test (government requirement)	Interview	Video interview
Assessment Centre	Assessment Centre	Assessment Centre	References	Assessment Centre	Assessment Centre
Final interview with partner	Final interview with regional manager	-	Attend Summer Institute programme	-	-

From Table 3.1 it can be seen that psychometric tests, also referred to as online tests, form an early stage of the recruitment process for each organisation. Page (2018) posits that psychometric tests are used to provide objective measureable data on an applicant to identify traits that are more difficult to ascertain at interview. Tests can include numerical and verbal reasoning, spatial awareness and situational judgements to name just a few. The tests also act as a filtering mechanism (Targetjobs, n.d.b) as

they allow organisations to quickly reduce a high-volume of applications to a more manageable number for qualitative evaluation. Most applicants are therefore rejected at the testing stage as they do not meet the criteria set by the organisation. Research by Strand (2003) found no substantial gender differences in performance on cognitive tests of this nature. However, while their study was based on laboratory rather than actual psychometric tests, Brienza and Grossman (2017) did find social class differences in reasoning abilities with working-class participants' performance being weaker. Jacobs' (2018) questioning whether organisations have become too reliant on testing to inform their recruitment decisions appears valid as potentially good candidates are overlooked simply because they fail to perform well on a particular measure.

Humburg and van der Velden (2015) found that the early stages of the graduate recruitment process focuses on occupation-based skills, demonstrated through qualifications and a CV, while the later interview stages focus on softer, inter-personal skills that could only be demonstrated in a face-to-face situation. Graduates therefore require a range of attributes to negotiate the different stages (Chamberlain, 2016). Blythe (2015) recommends that rather than focusing on highly competitive schemes, more graduates should consider employment within small to medium-sized organisations. Only recruiting graduates when a vacancy arises, the recruitment process is usually shorter, often comprising a CV-based application and a face-to-face interview. Due to the nature of these roles the number of applicants tends to be lower so potentially less competitive. Sear, Scurry, Swail and Down's (2013) research indicates smaller organisations can find it difficult to access suitable channels in which to advertise graduate positions in comparison to their non-graduate recruitment possibly limiting their search for talent.

Securing employment after university is therefore challenging, particularly as it occurs in conjunction with final-year studies when students are facing pressure to perform at a high level. Burtnett (2010) acknowledges that career decision-making can be a fraught process particularly as entry requirements vary significantly depending upon the occupation and sector. The wide-range of recruitment practices and information sources also makes it difficult to match suitable graduates to organisations with many talented young people remaining unemployed and companies complaining about unfilled vacancies (Branine & Avramenko, 2015). McKeowan and Lindorff (2011)

found persistence is important when first entering the labour market, though, it can be difficult to continue applying when repeatedly facing rejection. Mason, Williams and Cranmer (2009) suggest that despite universities teaching employability skills they do not necessarily have a significant impact on employment outcomes as the recruitment process looks for inherent rather than taught attributes. Additionally, Wilton (2011 p85) posits that “the relationship between employability and employment is far from straightforward” as being employable does not directly lead to employment. External factors such as labour market conditions (Hazenbergh, Seddon & Denny, 2015) as well as personal circumstances must be taken into consideration. The next section will frame these inequalities based on Bourdieu’s concepts.

### 3.6 Bourdieu and Employability

Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) ‘thinking’ tools of capital, habitus and field have been used by a number of researchers to explore the concept of employability and the transition from education to work. Kalfa and Taksa’s (2015) framework, based on cultural capital, habitus, field and doxa, explores the social construction of skills and their impact on employability. While Bathmaker et al. (2013) examine middle-class strategies deployed ‘to play the game’ and utilise resources to secure a graduate position. Clark and Zukas’ (2013) research adopts a case study approach to analyse the experiences of an information technology graduate based on his habitus and dispositions as he struggles to settle into his first job.

The transition from university to the workplace sees the meeting of two fields: the graduate labour market and the higher education sector. While the two fields, to an extent, can be considered homologous due to their close proximity (Tholen, 2015), they are actually independent and complex with their own power structure, values and rules for engagement. The graduate labour market can then be sub-divided as each sector has its own expectations and requirements meaning a graduate needs a good understanding of their chosen field of work in order to effectively engage with recruitment processes. However, employability is a relational construct with a graduate’s actual ability to gain employment being relative to others operating in the field at the time. An agent’s success within the labour market will depend on how desirable they are to employers who hold power in the field and can decide who they will offer employment to (Bourdieu, 1984). A graduate therefore needs to strategically

position themselves in a field to be successful, though, tactics will vary as an individual's approach is dependent on their habitus (Naidoo, 2004).

Expectations for education and employment are formed throughout childhood by familial habitus (Reay, 1998) with students from a middle-class background holding higher aspirations than their working-class counterparts (Burke, 2016). Gale and Parker (2015) consider aspiration to be culturally resourced, though, there can be disparity between a student's desire and the possibility of realising the outcome due to structural limits. However, Sellar and Gale (2011) suggest working-class students tend to be more modest in their aspirations, possibly being more realistic in terms of what they can hope to achieve. In contrast, Burke (2017) found middle-class students were only successful when they were strategic in their search for employment with non-strategic middle-class students struggling to secure graduate-level employment to meet their expectations. Students who are entitled, but lack career direction, experience inverted symbolic violence finding themselves underemployed due to their inability to negotiate entry to the job market. While middle-class students' habitus provides advantage there is the potential for hysteresis as the objective reality of the field of graduate employment is dynamic and continually changing meaning agents need to renegotiate their approach to the game.

Clark and Zukas (2013, p210) believe 'employability depends upon habitus' as embodied cultural norms and dispositions influence practice. Recruiting organisations tend to search for skills and abilities that are more likely to be found in students from a privileged background as their habitus is more closely aligned to the field of graduate employment. Redmond (2006) found widening participation students particularly struggled to secure graduate-level jobs due to academic experiences before their degree still being taken into account when applying for positions. In a competitive field of work economic, cultural and social capital are essential to help build CV's to differentiate applicants from each other (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Unfortunately, working-class students tend to focus on meritocratic achievement to improve their social position (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) believing academic qualifications alone enhance their employability and, therefore, failing to recognise the need for non-meritocratic credentials as well. Cultural capital, which also includes soft skills and interview skills, plays an important role in graduates packaging themselves as

employable as it helps them develop attributes that are highly sought after in the workplace (Brown & Hesketh, 2004).

Habitus, while it is durable, is not eternal (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) as agents can change their disposition to successfully operate in their chosen field. Changing habitus can be difficult, leading individuals to question the fundamental values of their upbringing and potentially dislocating them from their origins. (Friedman, 2016; Lehmann, 2014). As more disadvantaged students enter higher education, universities need to implement strategies to help the working-class develop their practices to be competitive in the job market (Bathmaker et al., 2013).

Tomlinson (2010, p73) considers employability to be 'an active social process' requiring students to engage with their personal development. Tholen (2015) posits that mainstream employability views agency and structure as being separate entities. However, he believes it is essential that employability is analysed from a graduate's personal context as well as taking into account the structure of the field they wish to enter. The models of employability discussed in this chapter map out the process, but do not address the dualism of objective structures meeting individual's subjective experiences. Capital, habitus and field are therefore useful and transferable concepts that will be applied to this research to analyse employability and engagement with graduate recruitment processes in terms of class, gender and ethnicity. The next sections will analyse graduate employability based on each of these factors.

### 3.7 Factors Influencing Graduate Employability

An unequal distribution of resources in society (Haasler, 2013) accompanied by heavily mediated opportunities to access employment (Knight, 2001) means that graduate employment outcomes are influenced by aspects of background such as gender, class and ethnicity (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). These factors influence separately as well as in combination through intersectionality. Morley (2001) supports this point of view stating that the employability discourse fails to accommodate these differences with models being presented as equally applicable to all. Okay-Somerville and Scholaris (2017) similarly believe this misrepresentation as they found that female, ethnic minority and working-class graduates are less likely to benefit from employability initiatives due to structural barriers. Absolute employability is a

graduate's ability to complete a task to the required standard whereas relative employability refers to a graduate's skills and abilities in comparison to others. Therefore, disadvantaged students who attend university in the hope of improving their employment opportunities may find the transition from education to work more difficult particularly in competitive sectors where there are few jobs available.

### 3.7.1 Employability and Class

Samuel, Bergman and Hupka-Brunner (2013) posit that social background and individual factors are linked to employment success with self-esteem and self-efficacy being important characteristics that are often lacking amongst those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Yorke, 2004). If experience prior to university has an impact upon employability then there are implications for the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Since employability is a complex construct, simply offering activities is insufficient as students have to actively engage with the process to develop themselves. Greenbank and Hepworth (2008) found that working-class students possessed little knowledge of the graduate labour market in comparison to their middle-class peers, finding it harder to successfully compete for jobs. Additionally, they were unaware of the importance of employability, tending to focus on their studies rather than participating in extracurricular activities.

A lack of economic capital forces many working-class students to undertake paid employment alongside their studies, consequently limiting time for CV building extracurricular activities (Waller, Mellor & Hoare, 2012). However, Gbadamosi, Evans, Richardson and Ridolfo (2015) report that part-time work, regardless of its level and nature, can have a positive impact upon employability. This only occurs when students value the work in relation to their career aspirations and have high levels of self-efficacy so they can utilise the experience gained in developing their individual employability. However, Kim, Hawley, Choc, Hygund and Kim (2016) note that it can be difficult for low-skilled workers to recognise their personal development due to the nature of their training.

A degree represents institutionalised educational capital allowing entry into the graduate job market. Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2003) note that cultural and social capital are important for successfully negotiating the recruitment process as middle-

class students are more likely to understand the rules of the game and exhibit desirable characteristics in face-to-face situations. Batistic and Tymon (2017) similarly note the importance of networking in developing employability with middle-class students being able to gain a better understanding of recruitment processes through their contacts. Research by Laughland-Booy, Mayall and Skrbis (2015) found middle-class students were less reflexive as they expected they would be able to secure graduate-level work as well as being protected by their parent's economic capital if their search was prolonged.

Morrison's (2014) research indicates that working-class students can be perceived as being relatively less employable due to the type of educational institution attended. Moreau and Leathwood's (2006) suggestion that prestigious organisations draw their candidates from a few high-performing universities disadvantages widening participation students as they are less likely to attend these institutions, usually preferring non-traditional, newer universities that are close to home (Reay et al, 2005). Geographical mobility increases employability (Alexander, 2019; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005), but household responsibilities or an unwillingness to move away from home can restrict employment due to a spatial mismatch of available jobs (Faggian, Corcoran & McCann, 2013). This is supported by Furlong and Cartmel's (2005 P19) findings that graduates from disadvantaged families are 'reluctant to move', again limiting opportunities.

Brown and Hesketh (2004) believe graduate recruitment processes, particularly assessment centres, reproduce inequality by selecting candidates on attributes that are the result of a middle-class habitus. Smart, Hutchings, Maylor, Mendick and Menter (2009) similarly found a large graduate employment scheme reproduced privilege, providing an unfair advantage for middle-class applicants. Possessing economic, social and cultural capital allows middle-class students to construct themselves as more employable (Bathmaker et al., 2013) to maintain their dominant position in the field of work. Abrahams (2017) further posits that working-class students misrecognise their dominated position in the graduate labour market by idealising meritocracy, believing that they can be successful based solely on their personal achievements rather than access to wider social networks.

Burke's (2016) study however, demonstrates the indeterminacy of habitus as only two of his conceptual groups met the employment expectations based on their class. Presenting a constant life history, the Strategic Middle Class exhibited symbolic mastery of the recruitment process by using their holdings of capital to successfully secure a graduate-level job. The Static Working Class also followed predictions by continuing to occupy a dominated position in social space through working in low skilled non-graduate roles. The remaining three conceptual groups did not follow expectations though. The Entitled Middle Class' high aspirations were not achieved as they failed to recognise, and adjust to, the ever changing demands of the graduate labour market leading to inverted symbolic violence. The remaining graduates in the study were working class and used the capital they had acquired at university to access the graduate labour market. However, once they had secured employment the Converted Working Class returned to their former habitus with low aspirations and understanding of the field to further advance their career. In comparison, the Strategic Working Class demonstrated that exposure to new experiences can alter habitus (Reay, 2004) as they used their newly acquired capital, and particularly social contacts, to develop a strategy to negotiate entry into the graduate labour market and achieve sustained social mobility through career progression.

Developing student employability while at university will not in itself reduce class barriers as graduates need to understand how the field of employment operates and their relative position in this social space. Graduates with a habitus that aligns with recruitment processes are also clearly at an advantage. However, while at university if graduates fully utilise support available to them it is possible to enhance employment opportunities, though, institutions must recognise that those from disadvantaged backgrounds face additional barriers.

### 3.7.2 Employability and Gender

A second factor influencing employability is gender. Despite achieving academically, women fail to successfully transfer their qualifications into corresponding occupational success (Samuel et al., 2013) continuing to be horizontally and vertically segregated in the workplace. In terms of degree subject studied, males continue to dominate mathematics, computer science and engineering while females form the majority of



undergraduates on teaching courses and subjects allied to medicine such as speech therapy and physiotherapy (HESA, 2018b). Subject discipline has an impact on employment choices as some careers require specific qualifications. Andrew's (2009) study of employability amongst women entering non-traditional industries posited barriers to entry were linked to their gender rather than individual abilities with a lack of confidence to work in a stereotypical male industry being a particular problem (Annese, 2016; Mark, 2014). While Wilton (2011), further supported by data from the Office for National Statistics (2017b), found that gender inequality occurs early in careers with females being more likely to occupy lower-level job roles immediately upon graduation. The discourse on employability is criticised by Gracia (2009) for being de-contextualised, failing to take into account the socially constructed nature of the workplace and the influences of gender that impacts on women's entry into the labour market.

Gender influences the construction of employability with habitus sub-consciously affecting attitudes and behaviours. Employability skills and abilities differ between males and females (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010), but the models of employability do not take these differences into account. O'Leary's (2017) research indicates that males and females would benefit from tailored development programmes as the latter tend to be less confident when positioning themselves in the labour market. Langowitz, Elaine Allen and Godwyn (2013) similarly recommend women into leadership education programmes are essential to professionally prepare female graduates for early career success by helping them to negotiate the socio-cultural barriers in the workplace.

Canetto, Trott, Thomas and Wynstra, (2012) found that career goals differ between males and females with men being more financially oriented while women prefer having a social impact. Additionally, the women surveyed incorporated their partner's needs into their career goals whereas the men only focused on themselves. Eccles (2011) similarly found that women choose work that they feel is valued by society. Career success is subjective depending on personal circumstances, but Enache, Sallan, Simo and Fernandez (2011) posit that women appear to have fewer choices in comparison to men with a lack of female leaders meaning there are few role models to inspire women to higher achievements. It must be questioned whether women do possess different orientations towards their careers or whether objective structures

have moderated their expectations that they frame their aspirations in more modest terms. Wilton and Purcell's (2010) research on graduate career orientations reported that females had lower expectations in order to accommodate non-work factors, particularly family and child care commitments. Accommodating the needs of others could also account for Botha and Coetzee's (2017) research findings that male graduates are more proactive than females in searching for employment as they tended to focus on themselves. Further highlighting gender differences, and potentially the challenges women face on entering the workplace, Raque-Bogdan, Klingaman, Martin and Lucas (2013) found female graduates required more emotional support from their families when negotiating entry into the workplace.

Social space does not represent equality of opportunity as individuals are disadvantaged depending on their holdings of capital relevant to the field in question (Bourdieu, 2000). Despite female graduates being educated to the same level as men persistent structural barriers remain, continuing to limit their access to employment and opportunities within the workplace.

### 3.7.3 Employability and Ethnicity

Employment outcomes after university vary depending upon a graduate's ethnic background, but overall, minority students, regardless of their ethnic origins, are disadvantaged in the labour market and more likely to be unemployed six months after graduation than their White counterparts (Lessard-Phillips, Swain, Pampaka, & Nwabuzo, 2015). Abrahamsen and Drange's (2015) research indicates that despite holding high career ambitions many ethnic minority students do not expect these to be fulfilled due to discrimination in the job market. While Shah et al. (2010) posit that labour markets are racial, making it difficult for ethnic minority students to relate their participation in higher education to employment opportunities upon graduation. Evidence suggests that even though White graduates are advantaged in the job market, a more detailed examination of the data is required as ethnicity and employment outcomes form a complex pattern of relationships that are differentiated by specific ethnic background (Zuccotti, 2015).

Zwysen and Longhi's (2016) data analysis found varying employment gaps between White and ethnic minority graduates. Their research indicated that Black Caribbean

graduates faced the smallest employment gap with more in work than any other ethnic minority group while Pakistani and Bangladeshi graduates faced the largest gap. It must be noted that the gap only measures whether a graduate is in work or not and does not take into account the level of job obtained. A further finding was that ethnic minority women face a slightly larger employment gap than males across all ethnic groups. In comparison, HEFCE (2015) established that Chinese graduates had the lowest level of employment six months after graduation followed by Black African and Bangladeshi. Similarly, Black Caribbean had the highest level of employment, but they were the least likely to be in professional work, a possible indication that they are unable to capitalise on their education to secure graduate-level work. However, forty months after graduation the situation had changed with the Chinese followed by Indians being the groups most likely to be in employment after White graduates. When focusing on the level of job, the HEFCE data indicated that Indian graduates were the most likely to be in a professional role at 0.4% ahead of the White population. After forty months Black African graduates continue to experience the worst employment outcomes at all levels. The picture emerging is quite clearly complex and changeable. HEFCE recommend further research is undertaken to explore the factors that influence these differences in employment upon graduation. Blasko's (2002) conclusion that it is still advantageous to hold a degree is still appropriate as ethnic minority graduates perform better in the labour market than non-graduate ethnic minorities.

Suggestions for these differences in employment outcomes have included cultural values influencing attitudes to career development (Fouad & Kantamini, 2012), cultural barriers effecting engagement with recruitment processes (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006), and limitations on application forms in terms of work experience and extracurricular activities (Himestra, Deros, Serlie & Born, 2013). In addition, Zwysen and Longhi (2016) suggest that ethnic minority students from low-educated communities have less opportunity to access advice, resources and networks regarding graduate employment and therefore find it particularly difficult to capitalise upon their qualifications. Khattab (2012) posits that a problem with labour market research on ethnicity is that it often adopts a homogenous approach, and does not reflect the complexity of cultural diversity both inter and intra-ethnic minority groups, making it difficult to gain a clear understanding of the issues.

Similarly to gender, ethnicity is not accommodated within the employability models with Vesterberg (2013) acknowledging there is limited research on the relationship between employability and ethnicity to fully understand the situation. In addition, Anthias and Mehta (2003) found the intersection of gender and ethnicity can place additional labour market constraints upon ethnic minority women with both structural and cultural factors contributing to their disadvantage. They also suggest that these relationships are further complicated as employment outcomes are subject to class processes as well. An example of the challenges faced is shown by Dwyer and Shah's (2009) research on high-achieving Muslim women. Indicating family support is available for them to succeed in education and enter employment, the young women had to carefully negotiate their transition into the workplace to fulfil roles that were considered to be respectable. Additionally, Bagley and Abubaker (2017) found Muslim women often experience hidden prejudice when trying to enter the workplace with Rootham (2015) commenting that western society constructs Muslim women as an oppressed group. Morley (2001) therefore, believes employability cannot be socially de-contextualised and must be considered in light of students' personal lives.

Owuamalam and Zagefka (2014) found that if an ethnic minority student perceives themselves as belonging to an under-valued group in society, they construct themselves as having lower levels of employability that negatively impacts on their self-esteem. In addition, Kenny and Briner (2010) observed that ethnic minority graduates felt they lacked power in the workplace due to few senior managers being from ethnically diverse backgrounds to act as role models and legitimise their position as potential leaders of the future, both being issues that could undermine an individual's perception of their employability. Brennan and Shah (2003) therefore recommend opportunities that increase confidence and self-esteem are more beneficial for ethnic minority students' employment outcomes than focusing on developing employability skills while at university.

Analysing the transition from university to the workplace Connor, Tyers, Modood and Hillage (2004) concluded that a number of inter-related factors including specific ethnic background, gender, socio-economic status, the institution attended, degree performance and job search behaviours all potentially influence career outcomes. However, due to the diversity of the graduate population they were unable to isolate the impact of ethnicity on its own in their research. Ethnic minority graduates clearly

face more challenges transferring from education to work with Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi being more likely to be over-educated in relation to the jobs they secure and therefore continuing to experience an 'ethnic penalty' in the labour market (Rafferty, 2012). Davies' (2014) suggestion that further research is required on the relationship between ethnicity and employability would therefore seem appropriate to fully understand the issues and develop strategies to support ethnic minority students so that they do not continue to be disadvantaged in the graduate labour market.

### 3.8 Developing a Graduate Identity

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997 p41) posit that career decision-making is socially situated with some students being more prepared than others to make a choice due to their wider 'culturally-derived horizons for action'. Dyke, Johnston and Fuller (2012) believe reflexivity is important as it enables students to interpret their circumstances and position themselves in the job market. The transition from education to work requires active management with Tomlinson (2007) finding students approaching it in three different ways. A Careerist is organised, proactive and sees a job as a 'life project' to be actively sought and managed. A Ritualist views work as a means to an end with a more passive and ambivalent attitude towards employment; usually there is little experience of higher education in their family background. Finally, a Retreatist is distant from the job market and pursues other goals rather than focusing on a career. Having a job role in mind can help students target their development, but Shariff (2011) believes the problem for many is that they do not know what they want to do as a career and, therefore, appear to lack focus and a clear sense of direction.

Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) consider employability to be a psycho-social construct combining personal adaptability, career identity and human capital. Each of these constructs can be developed separately, but are more powerful when operating together to present an employable individual with an ability to exert their agency. Moving from education into employment requires a reconstruction of identity as individuals become graduates rather than students (Holmes, 2015, Tomlinson, 2017). In addition, Webber (2015) posits that it can take longer for mature students to reconstruct their identity due to transitioning from a previously established life. Therefore, rather than employability simply being the possession of skills, Holmes

(2013) argues employability is a progressive process throughout a student's time at university, in order for them to be viewed as a graduate and ready for the workplace. Jackson (2016 p1) refers to the development of a 'pre-professional identity', positing that it is a combination skills, abilities and a belief in the ideology of a chosen profession to become employable in that field. It is therefore essential for an individual to have a good understanding of self in relation to a career to be able to align personal development at university to employment (Jackson, 2013). Self-perceptions on employability also influence graduate identity (Rothwell et al., 2008) with those believing in themselves presenting a more confident front to prospective employers.

Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) posit that graduate identity can be equated to cultural capital and comprises four elements; values, intellect, performance and engagement which allow a graduate to quickly settle into an organisation to begin making a contribution. Nystrom (2009) believes that as it combines both personal and professional aspects, a graduate identity cannot solely be derived from a university environment with wider life and family experience being relevant as well. An identity that aligns itself to the chosen field confers symbolic power upon the holder, allowing them to gain an advantageous position (Holt, 2012). Developing a graduate identity therefore relates to Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of capital and habitus which both contribute towards the process. An individual's identity is a product of their social and material circumstances and development is influenced by many factors including class, gender and ethnicity (Gazley et al., 2014). Haley, Jaeger and Levin (2014) found social and cultural factors, particularly amongst ethnic minority students, affected their identity as they sought to maintain their values and beliefs as they moved into the workplace.

A graduate identity is therefore more than simply possessing academic credentials (Tomlinson, 2008) with a wide range of factors identified in the employability literature as being essential such as skills, attributes, personal characteristics and an ability to adapt to the workplace. Viewing employability as a process to develop a graduate able to engage with the workplace has implications for practice in higher education. While universities can provide opportunities for developing employability to assume a graduate identity, it is clearly a complex, individualised process making it difficult to adopt institutional strategies. It is easier to focus on the elements that constitute a graduate identity when there is a profession associated with the subject studied (Boehm et al., 2015), but for subject areas with a broad range of potential employment

outcomes a generic approach is usually adopted. A graduate identity is personal to the individual and employability initiatives therefore need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the needs of the individual student as they complete their education and enter the workplace.

### 3.9 Chapter Summary

McCowan (2015) posits that while higher education has an obligation to help students become employable, universities are not in a position to solely address the continuing inequality in employment outcomes. Employability is a complex concept with a wide range of definitions and contributory elements, making it difficult to establish exactly what it means to be an employable graduate. Employability initiatives can help bridge the gap between education and work, but in a mass education system these have limited impact as not all students want to, or are able to, engage with the process. Rather than making abstract responses to these opportunities they are prompted by their capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 2000) with students who are already privileged being able to further strengthen their position in the job market. Employability models can help map out the process, but in a society where employability is individualised the advantaged continue to maintain their dominant position as structural barriers prevent many students gaining graduate-level jobs.

## **Chapter Four – Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter is an account of the research methodology used in this thesis. The first section will consider the philosophical approach adopted in this study in order to establish my ontological and epistemological position. I will then discuss my research methodology and how I applied Bourdieu's theoretical perspective in my work. This will also include a reflexive account of my position in relation to the study. Following on from this I will focus on the research methods used, firstly by explaining why I decided to collect my data through qualitative interviews. I will discuss the role of power within interviews and ethical considerations taken to ensure the interests of all parties were protected. Next I will discuss my sample and the reasons for participant selection. I will also reflect upon adjustments that had to be made as the study progressed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the data analysis techniques applied in my research with an explanation of my reasons for choosing template analysis and how my interpretation led to the three chapters of findings.

### **4.2 Philosophical Approach to the Research**

Research can be separated into the two broad strategies of quantitative and qualitative studies with each approach utilising a range of methodologies and methods to collect and analyse data. Quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and undertaking statistical analysis to measure relationships between chosen variables. Research findings are arrived at deductively and reported objectively in relation to a hypothesis (Bryman, 2008). In contrast, qualitative research is associated with the use of language to gain an understanding of the social world where the aim is to explore and understand lived experience. Qualitative research is distinctive from quantitative research in its ability to gather rich data that brings the researcher into close proximity with an individual's point of view to examine the experiences and constraints of their everyday lives (Becker, 1996). Atkinson and Delamont (2006) posit that rigorously designed qualitative research, where the researcher spends extensive time in the field, provides a deep understanding of the observed phenomena. While many researchers focus on either quantitative or qualitative techniques it is possible to combine the two in a mixed methods approach providing it is appropriate for the study (Bryman, 2008).



As discussed in Chapter One, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach in order to understand participants' experiences of engagement with the graduate labour market during their final-year of study and the first year after graduation.

Establishing a theoretical approach at an early stage of the research process is important to allow the development of a meaningful study that makes sense to the researcher (Silverman, 2013). Philosophical debate helps in understanding the different positions that can be taken in relation to social research by first considering the basis of knowledge. Ontology refers to the "study of being" (Crotty, 1998 p10) exploring the nature of the world and our understanding of our existence within it. Ormston, Spencer, Barnard and Snape (2014) identify two ontological positions; realism and idealism. Realism posits that a reality exists externally and independently to our beliefs of the world. Blaikie (2010) differentiates between realism that is completely independent of humans, referring to it as shallow or conceptual realism, with realism that exists independently, but is influenced through our interpretation of the observed phenomena, described as cautious realism. In addition, he posits that subtle realism recognises that an independent reality exists, but our understanding of it is socially constructed. In contrast, idealism states that reality does not exist independently of our beliefs and is subject to interpretation. Snape and Spencer (2003) suggest that ontological idealism means that a mental process is at the foundation of all reality. Idealism can be collective, where a group of people share the same belief, or radical where individuals construct their own personal meaning (Ormston et al., 2014). If individuals or groups construct their own understanding of reality it is possible for multiple perspectives to co-exist alongside each other through their different interpretations (Blaikie, 2010).

King and Horrocks (2010) use the terms realism, similarly defined as above, and relativism to define ontological perspectives. A relativist ontology suggests that "our understanding and experiences are relative to our specific cultural and social frames of reference, being open to a range of interpretations" (King & Horrocks, 2010 p9). Winch (1964) believed that reality was dependent on culture and, rather than an absolute truth of what is considered real, it is determined by a society's cultural practice. Within relativism 'truth' is singularly defined so reality is unique to the individual (Denicolo, Long & Bradley-Cole, 2016). Context is therefore important to relativism as interpretations are set in a particular time and location.

Considering the points raised in this philosophical discussion, my ontological position is one of relativism as I believe knowledge can never be completely independent since, as humans, we construct meaning and understanding of observed phenomena based on our values and beliefs (Filmer, Jenks, Seale, Thoburn & Walsh, 2004). I therefore align myself with King and Horrock's (2010) definition of relativism where understanding is influenced by our cultural and social background, impacting upon our experiences. It must be noted that while knowledge is often collectively agreed, as groups of people share the same beliefs, there is also the potential for interpretations that are unique to the individual with this unpredictability of human behaviour adding to the complexity of social research.

Crotty (1998) believes that a researcher's ontological position should be deliberated in conjunction with their epistemological position. King and Horrocks (2010) similarly posit that ontological considerations are bound up with epistemological ones as they influence each other. Having considered the ontological position for this thesis, the philosophical debate will continue by discussing epistemology.

#### 4.2.1 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge and how individuals justify what they believe to be true (Moser, 2002). Maynard (1994 p10) furthers this by positing that "epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure they are both adequate and legitimate." Understanding a researcher's epistemological position is important in understanding their role in relation to the chosen methodology (Willig, 2013) as it explicates a coherent relationship between the research design and the chosen methods to ensure the research question is addressed. Additionally, as knowledge is related to its sources (Audi, 2002) the epistemology will also influence the data collection methods chosen to meet the research objectives.

Discussing epistemological positions, Quinlan and Zikmund (2015) identify the two contrasting approaches of positivism and interpretivism. Positivism is based on the existence of a single objective reality that is independent of human consciousness (Duberley, Johnson & Cassell, 2012). Through deduction, researchers seek an objective, unbiased truth related to the phenomena being observed. It is assumed that

researchers are independent and their study is free from personal values that could prejudice research outcomes (Dudovskiy, 2018). Burr (2015) however, argues that it is impossible for humans to be entirely objective as understanding of research findings is always open to individual interpretation. Through the use of large data sets and quantitative methods, positivistic research is usually associated with the production of results that can be generalised across populations (King & Horrocks, 2010).

In contrast, interpretivism is associated with qualitative research where emphasis is placed upon exploring the subjective meaning of human behaviour. Cresswell (2014) points out that multiple views of the same phenomena can exist as each individual will have a different understanding of a situation based on their personal history and cultural background. Research participants therefore become co-constructors of knowledge with Bryman (2008 p16) positing that the role of a researcher adopting an interpretivist approach is to “gain access to people’s thinking” in order to interpret their actions and understanding of the world. When undertaking qualitative analysis, Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) warn that it is essential for the researcher to carefully present the knowledge gained from their data so as not to misrepresent the research participants understanding of their reality.

Crotty’s (1998 p67) statement that interpretivism “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” therefore aligns with my ontological position of relativism. Robson (2002 p25) further adds to the alignment between interpretivism and a relativist ontology with his view that “reality is represented through the eyes of the participants”. Following an interpretivist approach I therefore follow Schwandt’s (1998) position that individuals make sense of the world around them from their own perspective. The aim of my study is to explore, from a student point of view, behaviours during the final-year of undergraduate study in relation to the graduate labour market, and approaches to the transition from education to employment taking into consideration the influencing factors of class, gender and ethnicity. Burr (2015) however, believes researchers should adopt a critical stance towards their work recognising that interpretations of meaning are a product of a particular time and place and may be subject to change as further research develops new understanding. I acknowledge my research is situated in a specific time and context as all respondents studied at the same northern university and graduated in the same year, therefore, positioning the findings in both time and place.

Within my study I have adopted an interpretivist paradigm as it can accommodate multiple perspectives when analysing meaning within data (Tanh & Tanh, 2015). An interpretivist framework will allow me to go “beyond just the words of the participants” (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p268) to provide a rich, deep and contextualised understanding of their experiences. Through interpretivism understanding is inductively created from the gathered data (Ormston et al., 2014). Knowledge and understanding, from the respondent’s point of view, is therefore co-produced with the researcher, though the latter should recognise their influence on the process through reflexivity (King & Horrocks, 2010). Ormston et al. (2014) further note that the researcher’s values will mediate the research outcomes and their impact should also be acknowledged in the process. A reflexive account positioning myself in the study is presented in Section 4.3.1 where I apply Bourdieu to my methodology and my position is explained more fully in Appendix A.

Following the adoption of an interpretivist paradigm, the epistemological position taken in this study is one of constructivism. Through constructivism “reality is socially constructed” where the “role of the researcher is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge” (Robson, 2002 p27). Crotty (1998 p58) refers to constructivism as “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind”. While Hughes and Sharrock (1997) believe reality cannot be truly independent as knowledge is constructed through language with the potential for different interpretations to be drawn from the same phenomena. Young and Colin (2004) similarly refer to constructivism as a cognitive process. In contrast, Lincoln et al. (2011) suggest constructivism can also generate collective meaning where groups share the same understanding of a particular phenomenon.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to their constructivist paradigm as naturalistic inquiry which also recognises that there are multiple realities of the world with meaning being constructed and held within the mind. Individuals’ constructions of reality may differ, and therefore be in conflict, but all are potentially meaningful as they represent a person’s particular understanding of the social world (Schwandt. 1998). The role of a constructivist researcher is to elicit information from participants in order to analyse, interpret and present their understanding of reality.

Interpretivist research is therefore typically associated with an inductive bottom-up approach where gathered data is analysed for patterns and relationships to develop new theory and knowledge (Bryman, 2008). This is in contrast to top-down deductive research, normally associated with positivism, where existing theoretical concepts are applied to the data. Woo, O'Boyle and Spector (2017) warn that a purely inductive approach can lead to a high volume of disconnected knowledge. To overcome this Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) recommend a hybrid method to inductively search for data-driven themes as well as applying theoretical-based codes. A hybrid approach has been used in my study as I inductively searched my data for patterns and relationships to consider the influences of class, gender and ethnicity. However, applying Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of habitus, capital and field provided an established framework with theoretical-based themes to set my analysis in. My approach to data analysis will be discussed in more detail later in Section 4.7.

A further point for consideration at this stage is that an interpretivist constructivist approach is usually considered to be subjective with findings relating to a specific situation (Bryman, 2008). However, when constructing meaning from observed phenomenon, Bury (1986) believes it is possible for there to be both a subjective and objective element to a study. To support this view, Andrews (2012) provides an example of understanding a disease. Positivistic research can be undertaken on the disease to improve treatments, but the meaning of having the disease is constructed through everyday interactions as people attempt to make sense of their situation. Denicolo et al. (2016 p31) also purport that constructivists "align with the belief that both external objective reality and internal subjective realities may well exist". However, they further state that constructivist researchers are interested in the diversity of individual experience and the meaning constructed from a person's understanding of reality.

#### 4.2.2 Epistemology – Structural Constructivism

Fowler (1997) positioned Bourdieu's epistemology as one of structural constructivism developed to overcome the dualism of objectivity and subjectivity. Bourdieu (1996) believed that the rules of structured fields, such as education and employment, are constructed by those agents holding power through dominant positions. Individual

engagement with the field then depends upon an agent's holdings of capital with their experiences being subjective due to their personal circumstances. Knowledge of how to engage and negotiate these structures reflects social and cultural factors that have the potential to influence on both a collective and individual basis.

Like Bourdieu, I believe that objective structures are socially constructed by those in power and then an individual's experience of engaging with these structures is subjective based on their habitus. A constructivist epistemology is therefore compatible with my ontological position of relativism where meaning is interpreted depending on our values and beliefs that in turn are influenced by our social background. The focus of my study therefore is to construct meaning by interrogating students' subjective experiences while simultaneously recognising the effect of the objective social structures of the field of higher education and the graduate labour market. Within my analysis I am looking for evidence of their habitus and holdings of capital in order to be able to consider the influences of class, gender and ethnicity on their personal circumstances. Considering the above discussion the theoretical perspective underpinning Bourdieu's work will now be examined as his writings have been a major influence upon my research.

#### 4.3 Bourdieu's Theoretical Perspective

The complexity of explaining the social world can be challenging for researchers, but Grenfell (2012) posits that Bourdieu's theory of practice is an effective approach to analyse and interpret commonplace daily experiences. Webb et al. (2012 p1) similarly believe that his work is "the most significant and successful attempt to make sense of the relationship between objective social structures and everyday practices." In his research Bourdieu selected a social phenomenon as his starting point before focusing on empirically theorising the practice taking place through data collection and analysis (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

To achieve this level of understanding, Bourdieu (1973) identified three types of knowledge. Firstly, phenomenological knowledge that simply seeks to explain experiences in the social world based on the observations alone. Secondly, objectivist knowledge that has the ability to comprehend objective structures providing it

considers the conditions under which the structures are developed in the first instance. Finally, praxeological knowledge that is:

“concerned not only with the system of objective relations constructed by the objectivist form of knowledge, but also with the *dialectical* relationships between these objective structures and the structured dispositions which they produce and which tend to reproduce them, *i.e.* the dual process of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality”

(Bourdieu, 1973 p53)

When undertaking sociological analysis, Bourdieu adopted a praxeological perspective to effectively “weave together a “structuralist” and a “constructivist” approach” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992 p11). This is achieved through the concepts of field, capital and habitus being used collectively to analyse an agent’s subjective experience within the objective structures of the world they inhabit. Reay (2004) posits that these tools align themselves to the messiness of the real world so that habitus can be used methodologically to interrogate rather than simply explain data. The meaning of these concepts was introduced in Chapter Two and they will be further discussed when analysing the data.

Peters (2014 p144) suggests that Bourdieu’s praxeological approach effectively overcomes the subjective/ objective dualism by being “*openly* determinist, committed to the scientific identification of the causes of particular courses of human agency and social processes.” Being able to analyse subjective experiences within objective structures is important for my research as I am exploring the everyday practice of students’ experiences of engaging with the fields of higher education and graduate employment. While students have the ability to make personal decisions upon graduation they are not completely free choices due to individual circumstances, as well as organisations constraining the process through rules and procedures. Therefore, Bourdieu’s epistemological position of structural constructivism (Fowler, 1997) aligns with my own beliefs as outlined in the previous two sections.

Grenfell (2012) discusses three-levels in applying Bourdieu’s methodology. The first is the construction of the research object which Bourdieu believed could be the most difficult part of the process. Choice of topic is influenced by personal interests and academic background and a researcher should be cognisant of the impact of their

beliefs and values upon a study (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu additionally advocated that the research object is revisited during the course of a study as it will be developed and amended as data is gathered and analysed.

The second stage is field analysis to map out the relationships between agents and the power structure within a particular field. Hardy (2012) breaks field analysis into three further steps. The first examines the field in relation to other fields, particularly the field of power which Bourdieu ultimately believed was political power. Secondly, the structural positions of agents within the field are expressed in terms of capital holdings. Finally, the habitus of individual agents are examined in terms of their relationship to other agents within the field.

The third stage of Bourdieu's methodology is participant objectivation which is epistemologically important as it allows the researcher to "recognize and control the effects and influence of their own relation to the object of research" (Deer, 2012 p197). For Bourdieu a high degree of self-reflexivity is essential within sociological practice to control for the relationship between the researcher and the object of their research (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Reflexivity should therefore be undertaken on a continual basis as a researcher's perspective may alter during the course of a study depending upon their findings (Berger, 2015).

Analysing social processes reflexively using Bourdieu is achieved through two epistemological breaks (Robbins, 2012). The first one requires the researcher to break from their primary experience and preconstructions to consider the social practices being observed with "a "new gaze," a *sociological eye*" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 p251). Lane (2000 p92) describes this as achieving "a moment of objectification in which the hidden logic of the social processes was laid bare". The second break requires the researcher to reflexively question their social conditions that could potentially influence the researcher's interpretation by introducing "into the object the principles of his (*sic*) relation to the object" (Bourdieu, 1977 p2). These epistemological breaks allow the researcher to understand their position in relation to the study as well as their impact upon the process, though, Costa et al. (2019) posit that it can be challenging to negotiate the interplay between subjectivity and reflexivity to produce new knowledge and understanding when undertaking research. The next section is a reflexive consideration of adopting Bourdieu's methodology in my research.



#### 4.3.1 Applying Bourdieu to my Research Methodology

Methodology includes the process of determining how knowledge is acquired in a specific research project and is influenced by a researcher's theoretical position (Gray, 2014). As this is a qualitative study I wanted to gather rich and deep data (Mason, 2002) to understand students lived experiences in the year immediately before and after graduation. Qualitative data would then allow me to implement an interpretivist paradigm, using Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field and habitus, to explore the influences of class, gender and ethnicity upon engagement with graduate employment opportunities. Applying Bourdieu through an interpretivist framework is compatible to my study as it is associated with a constructivist epistemology (Denicolo et al., 2016), and seeks "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998 p67). Interpretivism allows an intense study into a single case or phenomena (Seale, 2004) which is again ideal for my research as all the respondents studied at the same higher education institution. Bourdieu's three-stage methodological approach has therefore been applied to this study. As outlined above, the first stage is to construct the research object. The aim of this thesis is to explore the influences of class, gender and ethnicity upon student engagement with the graduate labour market and their experiences in the first year after completing their degree.

As recommended by Bourdieu (Grenfell, 2012) my research object has been refined and developed during the course of the study. The original research proposal, for example, had been to compare the experiences of Business Management students at a post-92 university with a positive reputation for inclusivity and widening participation with those at an elite Russell group university. I chose northern universities so that I could physically attend if required. I had already gained access to a widening participation university, but when I approached an elite university in the region I received no response. Then, through a professorial contact, I gained access to a city-based Russell group university and was given permission to electronically circulate a request for students to participate in my study. Unfortunately I received only one response and the student then declined to be involved any further when I explained my research. As time was progressing in the academic year a decision was made to focus on students studying a range of disciplines at the post-92 university that I had already gained access to in order that the data could be gathered from the same year

group of graduates. This change impacted upon my research object as I would now be analysing experiences at a single institution rather than a comparison between an elite and a post-92 university.

A second change to my research object related to my interpretation of the term engagement. Initially I assumed that all participants would be seeking employment upon graduation, particularly due to recent fee increases and the positioning of higher education as a route to employment. However, an early finding from my contact with participants was that students did not necessarily look for graduate employment upon completing their studies for a range of personal reasons. I therefore broadened my perspective to recognise that students had a right to make their own choices upon graduation which could include a decision to pursue alternative paths to graduate employment.

The second stage of Bourdieu's methodology is field analysis with the first step being to map the fields of power in relation to each other (Hardy, 2012). The first field relevant to my study is the field of higher education. Attending university provides students access to opportunities, experience and qualifications that should allow them to apply for higher-level graduate employment. Chapter Two discusses the inequalities that are present in this field with White middle-class students particularly being advantaged in relation to the type of institution attended and academic results achieved (Reay et al, 2005).

The other field relevant to my study is that of graduate employment, but this is a complex field as there are numerous organisations operating within it, each with their own rules and practice. Chapter Three discussed the overarching principles of the field of graduate employment. The chapter also discussed graduate recruitment processes deployed within the field where large organisations with structured schemes are commonly perceived as more desirable (Targetjobs, n.d.a), and therefore hold more power in attracting graduates in comparison to smaller organisations who tend to recruit later in the cycle. Except for small-scale initiatives directly linking university with industry, the field of higher education and the field of graduate employment are independent, requiring students to understand at an individual level how to successfully make the transition from university to the workplace (Tholen, 2015). While it is considered that one role of a university is to supply suitably qualified and able

graduates (Dearing, 1997), ultimately it is the field of employment that holds the power as they make the final decision as to which graduates they recruit.

Having identified the relevant fields, the second step of field analysis, as outlined by Hardy (2012), is to focus on an agent's structural position in relation to the field. Students with higher holdings of economic, cultural and social capital are more likely to attend prestigious institutions (Webb et al., 2002). In turn, students attending universities that are considered elite can benefit from their institutions reputation when entering the workplace as their graduates are regarded as more successful (Ingram & Bathmaker, 2013). As previously identified in Chapter Two White, middle-class students are advantaged in the field of higher education which continues through to the workplace. Males are also advantaged in the field of graduate employment through horizontal and vertical segregation (Wood, 2008).

Hardy's (2012) final step is to compare individual agent's habitus in relation to other participants in the field to establish the dispositions and capital most relevant to holding a dominant position. Bathmaker et al., (2013) found that middle-class students, who are already advantaged academically, continue to strategically exploit their dominant position when seeking graduate employment, particularly as their habitus is more compatible with the field of graduate employment (Clark & Zukas, 2013). In relation to the graduate labour market, being able to demonstrate soft transferable skills and an ability to perform at interview would also be considered as holdings of cultural capital as these potentially allow individuals to differentiate themselves from other applicants (Burke, 2016). The last two stages discussed, considering the structural position of students in relation to the field and their habitus, are achieved through data analysis with the findings being discussed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

The final stage of Bourdieu's methodology is participant objectivation to position myself in relation to the study. A detailed reflexive discussion on my personal background is included in Appendix A, but as outlined in Chapter One my personal trajectory has had a significant influence on this research both in terms of the topic chosen and my perceptions of student behaviours upon graduation. As an insider in the field of higher education I work with students on a daily basis and this research was driven by a desire to gain a deeper understanding of current students' hopes and plans for their lives after university. During the study I became aware that due to

working in higher education for many years my perceptions of the role of universities and what constituted good graduate employment had narrowed. I therefore critically reviewed my own assumptions on both of these points. I achieved this by firstly revisiting my own reasons for attending university, which was the acquisition of knowledge rather than a good job, and recognised that the discourse and focus on employment statistics had influenced my view. In conjunction with this I also realised that I viewed the highly competitive graduate schemes as being the most desirable employment outcome, yet I had left one myself within two years of finishing university. I therefore broadened my perspective on both areas to adopt a more critical approach in my analysis by recognising the subjectivity of students' reasons for attending university and the next steps taken upon graduation.

To summarise my position, education has been a life-transforming process for me changing my place in social space. Key influences on my habitus, and therefore my study, are that I am from a working-class background. However, through education and graduate-level employment both of which I value, my position has changed to being middle class. I believe in hard work as it is through this I have gained access to economic capital. I also understand the importance of cultural and social capital and regularly engage in activities to continually increase my holdings of both forms to maintain my position within the workplace and beyond.

Having reflexively considered my position in relation to the research it has allowed me to then apply Bourdieu's praxeological approach to examine the dialectical relationships between the students' subjective experiences based on class, gender and ethnicity within the fields of education and graduate employment. Further discussion situating myself in terms of my own class, gender and ethnicity will be provided when discussing the interview findings. Therefore, having established the methodology the next section considers the specific data collection methods.

#### 4.4 Research Methods

Schwandt (1998 p222-223) refers to interpretivism as exploring the "uniqueness of human inquiry' where the role of the researcher is to "watch, listen, ask, record and examine". Therefore, the specific research methods chosen to gather and analyse data must be relevant and compatible to the theoretical position taken in a piece of

research. Ritchie (2003) differentiates between naturally occurring qualitative data that is already in existence, for example, in documents and records, and generated data which the researcher creates themselves. As my research is based upon student perceptions and experiences there was no naturally occurring data available that I could access to answer my research questions. I therefore had to collect my own data so this thesis is based on generated data gathered from a series of interviews. The following sections discuss my reasons for choosing qualitative interviews to gather my data, my design of the interview process as well as my conduct of the interviews in practice. I also discuss the role of power in relation to qualitative interviews and specifically in my research.

#### 4.4.1 Choosing a Research Method – Qualitative Interviews

I decided that qualitative research interviews were the most appropriate technique for this research as they allow the subject matter to emerge during the process while simultaneously ensuring that the research questions are being met (Gray, 2014). Interviews are also compatible with a constructivist epistemology which acknowledges how the researcher and the interviewee co-produce knowledge to understand experiences within the social world (King & Horrocks, 2010). Clarke (2007 p430) supports this point by stating that “*all* meanings of all kind of things – materials and non-materials – are constructed by people as they ‘do’ life”. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) similarly recognise the significance of gathering mundane, every day knowledge and its subjective meaning in creating an understanding of social practice. Costa et al. (2019 p28) consider participant accounts to be “interactive instances” with narratives being rooted in the context of their experience. Therefore, Heaton, Day and Britten’s (2016) reference to participants as active agents making a contribution in the co-production of knowledge recognises the importance of the interviewee’s involvement in the process.

Kvale (2007) prefers to use the term conversation as an interview is an interactive process where knowledge and understanding are co-constructed through dialogue. May (2001 p120) likewise refers to interviews as conversations between the researcher and the respondent that provide “rich insights into people’s biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings”. I therefore decided

conducting interviews as conversations was the best method for this research as the opportunity for an interactive discussion would allow me to explore students' lived experiences to gain knowledge and understanding of the year before and after graduation from their point of view. Conducting interviews as conversations would also allow me to gather rich and deep qualitative data as participants are likely to reveal more information if they feel they are having a discussion rather than being questioned (May, 2001).

While Yeo et al. (2014) believe in the benefits of gathering data through robustly conducted qualitative interviews they also question whether interviews can access the authentic reality of people's lives or whether the interview can only be viewed as a point of reality in itself with an interview at another point in time gathering a different data. Silverman (2013) additionally discusses the effectiveness of qualitative interviews in sharing meaning as the interviewee may express certain perceptions in the interview that they would frame differently when speaking in another context. Yeo et al. (2014) conclude that with careful preparation, and an appropriate level of skill, qualitative interviews provide thick descriptions that can gain insight into lived experiences. How I designed and conducted my interviews is discussed in the next section.

Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) state that curiosity is an essential asset for a qualitative interviewer and I definitely had a deep desire to learn through my research. At the start of my study I only understood student engagement with graduate employment opportunities from my own perspective as a tutor and personal experience from a number of years ago. I was aware of the opportunities currently available and the application processes employed by many organisations, but I did not know how students felt and engaged with them. The data in the study was therefore co-constructed as the students answered questions around a number of themes that I had designed, but they also provided additional information which shaped the interview process thus allowing me to learn from them. For example, I initially thought that most students would want a graduate job immediately upon completing their studies, but now recognise this is a limited point of view as I did not appreciate the wide range of personal hopes, ambitions and plans that students have upon graduation.

Burke (2011) suggests that gathering life stories through interviews can effectively illuminate the relationship between structure and agency. Agency is valued by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) due to its role in creating every day practice within society. Reay (2004 p435) recognises that an individual's agency can be demonstrated through their habitus which "can be viewed as a complex internalised core from which everyday experiences emanate". McNay (1999) also suggests that habitus can be used within research to indicate the deep rooted divisions created in society through class, gender and ethnicity. Burke (2016) advocates research should therefore consider both the general and specific habitus. General habitus relates to the collective conditions of a social class while specific habitus focuses on an individual's practice. While many people behave as expected based on the conditions of their background, Bourdieu (1990b) argues, particularly in his later work, that habitus allows the space for individual agency as behaviour is never entirely predictable with explicit rules and principles as agents always have the potential to change their situation. However, Bourdieu (1984) does acknowledge that individuals with limited capital holdings can face more challenges when attempting to strategically position themselves in the field. A more detailed discussion of habitus and its limitations is in Chapter Two, Section 5 of the literature review.

Habitus can therefore be used as a concept to analyse the dialectical relationship between the subjective and objective to "overcome this opposition by integrating into a single model the analysis of the experience of social agents and the analysis of the objective structures that make this experience possible" (Bourdieu, 1988 p782). Through the interviews I was able to explore, and therefore illuminate, students' individual habitus and agency through their subjective experiences of engaging with two key objective structures in particular, the higher education system and the graduate labour market. This relationship is demonstrated later within my data analysis in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Within the research process I have also reflected upon my own habitus and its impact upon my study. Of particular influence was the way in which I accessed professional careers advice myself as a student. I attended a ten-week careers course, utilised the job application resources in the careers centre, booked an individual appointment and attended a mock assessment centre all of which helped me to overcome potential structural barriers so that upon finishing my degree

I was able to exert my own agency to successfully enter the field of graduate employment (see Appendix A).

In summary, interviews are a key source of narrative data that allow the voice of the participants to be heard (Chase, 2011). Qualitative interviews can also access complex issues and allow the interviewer to explore and respond to the subtlety in different interviewee's responses (Byrne, 2004). Additionally, they are an appropriate data gathering method for the interpretive research that I am undertaking (Cleary, Horsfall & Hayter, 2014). Given the nature of this research, being able to develop a dialogue with each interviewee was essential to generate the depth of data to address the research questions. Qualitative interviews as a research method are therefore the most appropriate technique for this study and, having established the relevance of the method, I will now consider how the interviews were conducted in practice.

#### 4.4.2 Interviewing – Design and Practice

Interviews can be designed following a 'structured' model where every respondent is asked identical questions, be 'unstructured', where the focus is on the interviewee's perspective of the chosen topic, or semi-structured, where there are some predetermined questions, but the interviewer can probe further by asking additional questions depending on the respondent's answers (Robson, 2002). I decided that semi-structured interviews were most appropriate for my research as an initial set of themes could be used as the basis for each interview to ensure key areas were addressed, while simultaneously allowing me the flexibility to explore issues in more detail if I required clarification or elaboration of a point of interest. Through open-ended questioning that required detailed rather than one word answers, interviewees were encouraged to share their stories by focusing on their feelings and attitudes. The volume and depth of data gathered within the interviews through adopting this approach allowed me to gain an insight into students' personal backgrounds and their experiences of engaging with the graduate labour market.

As the aim of this study is to explore student experiences during their final year of study and their first year after graduation the interviews were longitudinal. The first interviews were held in October 2013 and the final ones completed in May 2015, therefore taking place over a period of twenty months. Section 4.6 discusses the



student sample in detail as the timings of the interviews varied depending on when the participants were recruited to my study.

King and Horrocks (2010) recommend that an interview guide is prepared beforehand to outline the main themes for discussion. The guide should be used flexibly though, allowing researchers to ask additional questions and, if necessary, make amendments to the guide as the interviews progress. The themes for the interview guide were based on the research questions outlined in Chapter One and a copy of this guide is contained in Appendix B. As the interviews were longitudinal it allowed me time before the second and third ones to prepare further guides that were more personal to each interviewee as previous transcripts were re-read and questions developed for areas of specific interest. In addition, to save time each interviewee completed a basic information sheet containing factual background data. An example of a blank information sheet is provided in Appendix C.

At the beginning of the interview I explained the purpose of my study and gained consent before starting to ask questions. I ensured that interviewees were comfortable with the process and emphasised they could stop the interview at any point if they felt unhappy. At the end of the interview I made students aware that they could speak to me again if they had any questions either relating to the interview or if they required any support regarding issues raised. A number of students did ask for careers and further study advice which I assisted with and if necessary referred them onto specialist support within the university.

The interviews were recorded using a high quality digital recorder and fully transcribed afterwards rather than relying on notes where details may be omitted (Smith, 1995). Another advantage of recording is it allowed me to concentrate on the interview process by using active listening (Kvale 2007) and follow up with supplementary questions. Since I taught the Business Management students these interviews were informal and could be described as a friendly 'chat' about their progress and plans for the future. Interviews with students from other subject areas varied with some being slightly hesitant at first, but as the interview progressed, they opened up more and I managed to gather all the information I required. Non-Business Management students returning for a second interview were more friendly and relaxed as we already knew each other and with these interviews were more conversational.

For the final interviews eight students had moved away from the university town so a conference phone was used with a loud speaker function so these could also be recorded. Novick (2008) suggests that traditionally telephone interviews have been regarded less favourably and considered inferior in qualitative research as they tend to be less in-depth than face-to-face interviews, there is an absence of visual cues and there is the potential for interviewees to be distracted in their own environment. Nandi and Platt (2017) however, focusing on subsequent telephone interviews in their longitudinal study, found no difference in data quality from telephone interviews in comparison to face-to-face interviews. They found that rapport and engagement with the research had already been established in the first interview, so respondents' contributions over the telephone were equally valuable in the follow-up interview. My own experiences concur with Nandi and Platt. As the first interviews were all conducted in person, the eight over the telephone were follow-up interviews where I already knew the interviewee. Participation in the telephone interviews was therefore similar to the face-to-face ones. For example, they lasted as long as the face-to-face ones and the depth of the information provided was also equal to the follow-up interviews carried out in person. The quality of the conference phone and the recorder did not impact upon the process so all responses were audible.

The interviews varied in length from thirty minutes to approximately an hour allowing me to gather rich, qualitative narrative data exploring student experiences. As recommended by Silverman (2013) I transcribed the interviews myself. While this was time consuming it brought me closer to the data as I could re-listen to the student's experiences which aided interpretation. Additionally, Silverman (2013) advises that an interpretivist approach requires more detailed methods of transcription, including pauses and the tone of the respondent, so by transcribing the interviews myself I could ensure the nuances of the conversation were captured within the transcripts. If a respondent paused I would wait, allowing them time to compose their thoughts rather than quickly posing another question. However, by noting these pauses in the transcript it helped me identify areas of the interview that the students found difficult in terms of the topic or uncertainty in expressing their answers. I also recorded my thoughts on their tone of voice which added context to the words and again helped with interpretation. While I did not have need for the high-level of transcript notation required for techniques such as conversation analysis and discourse analysis (Flick,

2009) I found the notes I made essential in adding context and feeling to the students' words which later helped in data analysis.

No interviewees expressed any concerns with the interview process. A number of students noted they had enjoyed the conversation as it had allowed them to reflect upon their position and take action moving forward. However, I was conscious that there could potentially be a conflict of power within the interviews and this will now be considered.

#### 4.4.3 The Role of Power within Interviews

Gubrium and Holstein (2002) refer to the relationship between interviewer and interviewee as being asymmetrical with both parties understanding the process of asking and answering questions. While both parties may be familiar with the process, Berger (2015) warns that interviewers should be conscious of the power relationship within an interview and the impact this may have upon the research. Finlay (2014) posits that the power relationship is both complex and multi-layered. The usual assumption is that the interviewer holds the power over the respondent within the interview (Chen, 2011), but in reality power is dynamic with the balance potentially shifting during the course of an interview. For example, the interviewee actually holds the initial power within the process as they have to agree to participate and provide consent prior to any research taking place (Finlay, 2014).

An imbalance of power cannot be avoided, but its effect can be reflected upon and taken into consideration within the research (Berger, 2015). Firstly, I had to choose the location for the interviews. Denzin and Ryan (2007) advocate that qualitative interpretive research should be conducted in a safe space. Therefore, I decided that the interviews should be held on the university campus as a neutral ground. I booked a room and placed notices upon the door that an interview was in progress to limit interruptions and to ensure as much quiet as possible. Additionally, to lessen the formality of the situation we sat together at a round table so that there was no physical barrier between us.

Byrne (2004) advises researchers to be reflexive regarding the specific position they approach the research from as age, job role, class, gender and ethnicity can all act as a basis of inequality that impacts upon power relations during the research process. A

full reflexive account of my personal background is provided in Appendix A. As noted previously my personal trajectory does have an impact on my position within the research. Being reflexive also ensures an ethical relationship is maintained between the interviewer and interviewee (Berger, 2015). I was particularly conscious that my role as a tutor may lead to respondents feeling forced to answer difficult questions as I could be considered to be in a position of authority where the usual convention is that students are expected to answer tutor's questions. Being aware of this potential imbalance in power led me to consider how I could mitigate for it. May (2001) refers to interviews as social encounters so I focused on a conversational style of interview with open questioning that encouraged the students to talk about their personal circumstances. If a student appeared uncomfortable with a particular line of questioning I moved on to another area, but where possible returned and rephrased the question at a later point in the interview.

Another challenge discussed by Riessman (1987) is the difficulty of interviewing someone from a different ethnic background as not sharing a cultural understanding can make it hard for the interviewer to make sense of the experiences being shared. Frankenberg (1993) and Garner and Selod (2015) posit that Whiteness provides a position of privilege in society leading to a lack of understanding of practice from other cultures. Gunaratnam (2003) considers the role of ethnicity and power in interviews agreeing that differences in ethnic background between the interviewer and interviewee can inhibit the latter sharing their experience. However, she also found that a difference in ethnicity can encourage disclosure as participants were eager to explain points in greater detail to help the interviewee understand their culture as an 'outsider'. Having taught in a multi-cultural environment for a number of years I have some knowledge of different cultural practice, but the interviews identified that as a White woman my understanding was limited. While my role as interviewer led to me being in a position of power during the interviews, I found that when speaking with students from a different ethnic background to myself the balance of power shifted to the students at several points as they had to explain aspects of their cultural practice to me so that I could understand its impact upon their engagement with the graduate labour market. This reinforces the point made earlier by Chen (2011) that power is dynamic and often held by the interviewee with researchers relying on them sharing their experiences in order to gather appropriate data.

Hoffmann (2007) also found power to be dynamic and changeable throughout the interview process. While the interviewer frequently holds the balance of power due to asking the questions, she also recognises that the interviewee actually holds significant power as they have the knowledge that the researcher is trying to access and can decide how much information they are prepared to impart. The interviewee therefore has power in determining whether the interviewer is able to gather sufficient data to answer their research questions. It must be noted that as a researcher I do not know exactly how the power relationship is played out in each interview as I have to accept that the information provided by respondents is the full story. Additionally, I am also aware that students potentially may provide answers that they think I want to hear due to my position.

Overall I enjoyed the interview process and consider them to be a success as I gathered sufficient and appropriate data to complete my data analysis. I feel that the students were open and honest with their answers as they provided detailed personal information that potentially would not have been shared under different circumstances. I also feel privileged that the interviewees shared their personal experiences with me as it allowed me to gain a deep insight into the year before and after graduation. Sensitive and confidential information was imparted during the process which indicates that the students trusted me within the interview setting. Prior to starting the interview I had guaranteed that their responses would be treated confidentially. When conducting qualitative research it is essential that the interests of both the respondents' and the researcher are protected. The next section will therefore consider the ethical practice implemented in this study.

#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

Punch (1998 p168) posits that research involving people must be handled with particular care to ensure issues relating to "harm, consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of data" are fully addressed to protect the interests of both the participants and the researchers. Davey and Liefhoghe (2004) suggest that qualitative researchers can ensure ethical standards are met within their work by reflexively questioning their position in the study as well as the methods used to gather data. When designing my study care was taken to work within the university's ethical

requirements. I therefore submitted my proposal to the relevant research and ethics panel and gained ethical approval prior to starting my first tranche of interviews.

From the start of my research I was conscious that as a tutor I am in a position of authority within the institution. As recommended by Lewis (2003) when asking students to be involved I stressed that participation was voluntary and the study was separate to my job role within the university so they were under no obligation to be interviewed. Once students had agreed to be involved, the first stage of each interview was to provide and discuss an information sheet (see Appendix C) which explained the purpose of my research and why they had been approached. In the information sheet I guaranteed that all responses would be treated in confidence and advised that transcripts would be stored securely where only I had access to them. There would be no identifying information on the transcripts and if they were referred to by name in the final thesis a pseudonym would be used to maintain anonymity. Appendix F records the pseudonyms used for each interviewee. In addition, background information details and consent forms were stored separately so they could not be linked back to individual students (Lewis, 2003). The safety of electronic data was maintained by being stored on a password protected system.

Bryman (2008 p121) advises that participation in qualitative research should be based on “freely given informed consent”. Therefore, after the information sheet had been discussed, and students indicated that they were happy to proceed, I required each participant to complete, and for both of us to sign, two copies of the consent form (see Appendix D) before starting the interview. One copy of the form was for my records and the other was retained by the participant. The consent form confirmed confidentiality and anonymity within the study as well as the fact that participation was voluntary. Signing the form gave me permission to use the data gathered from the interview within my research, but it also explained that they had the right to withdraw from the process at any time without needing to provide a reason. To protect my ability to complete my research, the consent form stated that participants could not withdraw their data six months after the date of the final interview. Issues regarding deceiving participants (Punch, 1998) are not relevant to this research since it is an overt study with all students being fully aware of their involvement and providing their consent before any data was gathered.

As part of the approval process a risk assessment form was completed considering both my personal safety as well as that of the students (see Appendix E). All interviews took place at times when other staff were in the building. I ensured that the departmental secretary was aware that I was interviewing in order that someone knew my location and that I was on my own with a student. Within the approval process the psychological safety of the student was also considered since we were discussing potentially sensitive personal information and experiences. Before the interviews I made myself aware of the wellbeing and support services provided by the university in case I needed to refer participants for further guidance. In the end the only services that I referred students to were careers and postgraduate advisors. By considering the above issues I believe my research was conducted ethically, protecting the interests of the students within the process as well as meeting the university's ethical requirements.

#### 4.6 Sample of Research Participants

Qualitative research is based on non-probability sampling where participants are selected based on characteristics that align with the aim of the study (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). Flick (2009) posits, though, that one of the main challenges for qualitative researchers is gaining access to relevant participants. As discussed in Section 4.3.1 Applying Bourdieu to my Methodology, the original intention for my research was to compare Business Management students from a university recognised for widening participation with those from a contrasting elite university. I managed to gain entry to a northern-based post-92 university, but I was unable to recruit participants from a Russell group institution so I had to amend my original research plans.

At my chosen university I was able to gain access to the total student population of 145 final year Business Management students. The course is diverse comprising home/ European and international students. In selecting the students to be interviewed the first decision was to focus on those brought up in the UK as they had experience of the same education system which would aid data analysis. I therefore excluded the 43 international students from the study by using a student record list that identified whether they were from home or overseas. Having selected my target population for Business Management I chose the students to be interviewed through purposive sampling. Punch (2005) describes purposive sampling as being deliberate to ensure

participants meet the research criteria while Teddie and Yu (2007) posit it can be used to choose unique cases or to ensure the participants are representative of the total population. In my study I wanted a representative sample with a mix of class, gender and ethnicity and therefore, using the list of names for the target population on the course in conjunction with my own knowledge from working with them, I purposively selected the Business Management students to be involved in my research.

Gender is a more easily observable characteristic so I could ensure there was an equal split between males and females in my sample. However, ethnicity and class were more difficult factors to determine. As all my interviewees were students I could not categorise their social class by occupation using a scheme such as the Office for National Statistics (2010) Socio-Economic Classification. Neither did I have sufficient personal information regarding parental occupation to classify the students by family background to inform my decision on social class. Since I taught all the final years I therefore had to select interviewees based on my perceptions as to whether they were working or middle class. My perceptions have been informed by my personal background, my reading of academic literature and the general discourse within the media and society. My perceptions impact on how I view others and did influence my choice of participants. I therefore need to define class in relation to my sample.

As discussed in Chapter Two class is a complex and contested concept. Milner (1999) defined class as a group of people sharing the same position in society based on their resources. Section 2.6 discusses how the government measure class using job roles and the conditions of employment attached to them and Table 2.1 provides the eight categories used in the Office for National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (ONS, 2010). Crompton (2010) and Dorling (2014) both believe allocating class on occupation is no longer appropriate as individuals may be employed in a job role that does not reflect their family background and conditions of existence. Following the work of Bourdieu, a cultural approach to measuring class was undertaken by Savage et al. (2013) using data from the 'Great British Class Survey' with positions being allocated on holdings of capital rather than occupation. The schema developed from this research is presented in Table 2.2.



As my theoretical framework is based on Bourdieu I am adopting a cultural approach to measuring class and I am interpreting resources as holdings of economic, cultural and social capital all of which can be used to position an individual in society in relation to others (Bourdieu, 1984). Visram (2013) comments that it is an unequal distribution of resources between the different levels in society that leads to social inequality. Skeggs (1997) notes that class has become increasingly invisible which supports Bourdieu's (1984) work stating that class is hidden in everyday practice. Therefore without knowing a person's background in detail it can be difficult to map their position in social space.

The invisibility of class presented me with a challenge when identifying students to participate in my research. To be able to consider social class in others the first step was to reflect on my own position in society. I have reflected on my personal trajectory in Appendix A indicating my background to be working class. I was the first in my family to attend university, and initially lacked confidence in my abilities and right to be there. However, from that period of time I would now define myself as middle class based on a number of factors. Firstly, I associate class with holding degree-level qualifications which leads to higher-level employment. Since I am employed as a university lecturer I would place myself in category 1 of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (ONS, 2010) as I consider my job to be in a higher professional occupation. I also associate class with disposable income, though, I do not necessarily equate it to material possessions as people have the right to choose how they spend their money. I consider myself to be financially comfortable as I have some spare income for extras such as holidays and meals out. However, I value money as I have had to work for everything I own. I do not consider myself to be materialistic as I am satisfied with my possessions and would rather spend my money on experiences. Using Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital would also position me as middle class as I enjoy hobbies such as reading and visiting museums, art galleries, and the theatre.

Positioning myself socially therefore influenced my selection of students to partake in my research. As I have adopted a cultural approach to measuring class I chose my participants based on my personal observations during seminars. I looked for embodied behaviours and considered a student's class on factors including their personal presentation, speech, the complexity of the language they used and their

confidence in class contributions and approach to people in authority. I believed that a middle-class student would be more likely to present themselves as entitled leading to a sense of belonging and worth within the university environment. I also related confidence to bodily dispositions and felt that middle-class students usually sat nearer the front so they could participate in class discussions rather than hiding quietly at the back. One of the early topics on the module related to occupational choice so during seminar discussions I noted comments that could indicate holdings of capital such as extracurricular activities and personal ambitions for the future. Within my interviews I asked students about extracurricular activities and their educational experiences while at school and university. I then pieced together information from their responses to decide which social class I would place them in. Rather than the more complex and detailed classifications used in NS-SEC (ONS, 2010) and the 'Great British Class Survey' (Savage, 2013), I referred to middle class and working class as used by Bourdieu (1984) with middle class students having higher holdings of cultural, social and economic capital due to their access to resources from childhood onwards. Finally, as part of the interview process I asked students to self-identify their social class based on their own perceptions and all except one identified with the class that I believed them to be in. The aim was to interview a breadth of students based on class and this was achieved as from their self-identification there was an equal split between working-class and middle-class Business Management students.

Ethnicity was also a difficult, and potentially contentious, factor to incorporate into my sample. As discussed in Chapter Two, Walters (2012) refers to ethnicity as a group of people who identify themselves with a particular cultural heritage. Similarly Nagel (1994) discusses ethnicity as a socially constructed model where, through the process of racialisation, groups of people to identify boundaries around themselves. Earlier work on the subject by Weber (1968) defined ethnicity as a group of people who believe they have a common descent whether it be based on cultural practice, historical experience or physical characteristics. The crucial element of this definition is the belief of being tied together which then forms an imagined community. Gill (2008) however, warns that ethnicity is a complex and contested concept with a multiplicity of meaning depending upon how an individual constructs their identity. Ethnicity cannot simply be reducible to cultural backgrounds as it is a dynamic process with understanding and interpretation being contingent on personal circumstances and

history (Chattoo & Atkin, 2012). Ethnicity is usually a term used to refer to a minority group of people, but being from a White heritage must also be recognised as an ethnic group (Rollock, 2014), and therefore an influencing factor that is included in my research. This is supported by Hall's (1989 p447) comments that "We are all, in a sense, *ethnically* located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are".

In my research I wanted to interview students from a range of ethnic groups, but it was difficult to identify these from the information I had available. Characteristics such as skin colour, dress and names could be considered as external indicators of a student's ethnic background, but they are not necessarily accurate as they do not reveal identity, personal subjective beliefs or social practice. However, I had to use these external features, along with my perceptions of characteristics associated with a particular ethnic group, as an initial basis for inviting students to participate in my research. While Islam is a religion it does encompass different ethnic groups so I used the students' dress as an external indicator that they were potentially from an ethnic minority background. For example, I thought a female student wearing a hijab was likely to be a Muslim. As part of the interview I then asked all participants to identify their ethnic background and I have subsequently used the phrasing that they identified themselves by in my data analysis. Having interviewed eleven students from four different cultural backgrounds I did ask the final Business Management interviewee their ethnic heritage prior to including them in my sample. This was due to not being certain how they would define their ethnicity and I wanted to ensure they were from a different background to the students I had already interviewed. As I knew the students well they did not raise any concerns about identifying their ethnicity and were willing to share their cultural practices with me.

In total twelve Business Management students were interviewed (see Appendix F for a summary of their background characteristics). The interviewees were largely representative of the student population in terms of an equal split on gender, an equal split between working and middle class and five different ethnic groups which were students from White, Chinese, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian family origins. There were no Black British students within the sample as these were the smallest ethnic minority group on the course and the ones I approached had not been educated in the UK. Each participant was interviewed three times, firstly at the beginning of their final

year to establish their background influences and plans upon graduation. The second interview was towards the end of the second term to update their plans and the final interview took place nine months after graduation.

Having being unable to recruit Business Management participants from another institution I had to review my research plan. It was decided to focus on the post-92 northern university as a single case, but to broaden my research to include other courses with the influencing factors of class, gender and ethnicity still being the focus of the interviews. Punch (2005) recognises that sampling plans have to be flexible where changes can be made due to circumstances beyond the researcher's control as was the case in my research. Providing there is a rationale that follows the logic of the study changes to the sample are acceptable. The decision to interview students from other degree subjects was based on a number of factors. Firstly, the twelve Business Management interviews had provided me with sufficient data to understand the attitudes and behaviours in relation to the graduate labour market for this degree subject and interviewing further students would be unlikely to gather further new data for analysis. The second influencing factor was that I wanted to expand my research to gain new insights (Flick, 2009) to see if students on other courses approached the graduate labour market in the same way or if there were differences based on the subject studied and the industry they were entering. Finally, time was progressing through the academic year and it was now February. I needed to interview students from other courses within the same academic year otherwise factors such as a changing job market and new university initiatives in relation to employability may impact upon my findings.

At this stage I began to use convenience sampling which Bryman (2008 p183) refers to as participants who are "simply available". Though Ritchie et al. (2003) believe this to be a less robust approach to sampling it is recognised that difficulty in accessing participants can lead the researcher to using convenience sampling to ensure sufficient data is gathered. Advantages of convenience sampling include respondents being more willing to participate due to their availability and the speed at which they can be recruited since they are easily accessible (Salkind, 2010). This last advantage was particularly important in my research as I had spent three months trying to access other universities and, having decided to focus on students at a single northern

university, I needed to recruit additional participants quickly so they could be interviewed within the same time frame as the Business Management students.

Through two course leaders acting as gatekeepers I managed to recruit eight further interviewees: three from History and five from Sociology. This was still fairly narrow if the aim was to interview students from other subject areas so I used the snowballing technique (Gray, 2014) to gain access to the remaining eleven participants. Snowballing uses personnel recommendations from existing participants allowing a researcher to access a wider network. Bloch (2004) warns snowballing may be limiting, though, if the interviewees share a similar experience. I therefore asked the students that I had already interviewed if they knew any other final-year students on different courses who would be willing to participate in my study. Amongst the students from other courses there was a mix of class and gender and two were from a different cultural background: Pakistani and Eastern European. Snowballing was effective as all eleven participants were on a different course and the data gathered added breadth and depth to my study. Participants from other subject areas joined the study later and were therefore only interviewed once during their final year towards the end of the second term. Only seven respondents from this group returned for a final interview after graduation, but as they all studied different subjects the breadth of experience was maintained. Appendix F summarises student backgrounds and the degree subjects studied. After 31 interviews I felt my data had reached the point of saturation as new interviewees were reinforcing issues raised in previous interviews rather than introducing new perspectives (Robson, 2002). At this stage I therefore decided that the in-depth interviews had provided me with sufficient rich and deep data to address my research questions.

The change in my research from comparing two institutions to focusing on a single one means that my research is now set into a particular context. As my findings are context specific it could be difficult to generalise them across the higher education sector (Bryman, 2008). However, Braun and Clarke (2013) acknowledge that context is important in research and should be taken into account rather than considering the findings as biased. Stake (2005) refers to naturalistic generalisation where experienced researchers with a tacit knowledge of a particular field would be able to recognise the similarities and differences in the findings and apply them to their own situation. Therefore this study could be of relevance to other universities and

particularly post-1992 institutions operating in a similar part of the higher education market. Qualitative research produces thick descriptions that could also be used in conjunction with a large-scale quantitative study to provide a human context to explain findings. Having established the research methods used to gather the data for my study I will now discuss the techniques applied within my data analysis.

#### 4.7 Data Analysis – Techniques and Procedures

Gray (2014 p602) describes qualitative analysis as “a rigorous and logical process through which data are given meaning”. With a wide array of techniques available it is crucial to select one that is compatible to the interpretivist framework used within this study. After reading literature on different approaches to interpretive data analysis, I decided to use thematic analysis and, based on the work of King and Brooks’ (2017), selected Template Analysis as the specific technique deployed. The next section will provide a discussion on the nature of thematic analysis before considering Template Analysis and its application within my research.

##### 4.7.1 Thematic Analysis

Boyatzis (1998 p1) refers to thematic analysis as a way of “seeing” as it is an effective interpretative process that allows the researcher to construct meaning from their data. While Braun and Clarke (2006 p79) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data”. They consider a theme to be a recurring and distinctive feature within the data that helps describe and explain the phenomenon being researched. In contrast, Holloway and Todres (2003) suggest that rather than being a separate method, thematic analysis is a core skill for a qualitative researcher as it is a stage used within more structured data analysis techniques to assist in the search for meaning and the presentation of findings. Additionally, King and Brooks (2017) posit that thematic analysis can be considered an umbrella term as a number of techniques fall into this category. For example, Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1995) both use themes within the application of their method.

However, Braun and Clarke (2006) and Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) believe that thematic analysis should be considered as a data analysis method in its

own right. An advantage of thematic analysis is that as a method it is flexible and can be applied across a range of qualitative research projects (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, Clarke and Braun (2017) outline its theoretical flexibility in that it can accommodate a range of ontological and epistemological positions. They also state it is flexible as a technique since it can be applied to different data collection methods, sample sizes and a variety of formats for research questions. A further advantage of thematic analysis is it can handle the messiness of real life so that complex situations can be analysed and interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2013). By allowing themes to emerge from the data the voice of a study's participants can be represented and heard within the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). Finally, Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) consider thematic analysis to be a pragmatic approach and an easily accessible method, particularly for novice researchers who may not yet have sufficient experience to handle more complex techniques for data analysis.

Holloway and Todres (2003) critique the tension between flexibility within thematic analysis and establishing coherence across the themes emerging from the data. To overcome this they suggest researchers reflexively engage with the process of data analysis, documenting decisions taken to provide transparent and trustworthy findings. In addition, Nowell et al. (2017) posit that a weakness of thematic analysis is that as it is less technical in comparison to other more detailed and prescriptive qualitative data analysis techniques such as Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), it is often treated with caution as to whether it is sufficiently rigorous. Braun and Clarke (2006) similarly believe that initially there was little regard for thematic analysis as there was disagreement as to how it should be applied within qualitative data analysis. Braun and Clarke therefore developed a set of guiding principles to provide clarity on how the technique can be used in practice, establishing thematic analysis as both a "rigorous and trustworthy" technique (Nowell et al., 2017 p11).

In their guiding principles Braun and Clarke (2006 p87) identify six phases that are necessary to complete a thematic analysis. These are:

1. Familiarising yourself with your data through transcription and reading.
2. Generating initial codes by systematically noting interesting features across the data set.
3. Searching for potential themes by collating similar codes together. Themes can be semantic, to provide a surface-level description of the data, or latent, to interpret and theorise findings from the data.
4. Reviewing themes to check for coherence and develop a thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes to refine until each theme is clearly defined.
6. Producing the report of the final analysis.

These principles provide a systematic approach to searching for and identifying themes before final analysis and interpretation takes place. They also advocate an audit trail is maintained to justify decisions taken within the process of analysis.

Following on from this, Template Analysis is a form of thematic analysis (King & Brooks, 2017), and while it shares many of the principles discussed above there are differences, particularly in relation to the production and presentation of a template which summarises the data analysis findings. The next section focuses on my reasons for choosing Template Analysis as a technique and how I applied it within my data analysis.

#### 4.7.2 Template Analysis

Similarly to Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, Brooks, McCluskey, Turley and King (2015) consider Template Analysis to be a flexible technique as it can also be used to analyse data from different methodological positions. It is however, a more structured approach than thematic analysis as it uses hierarchical coding with a deeper level of sub-codes to produce a template which organises the themes into a cohesive summary that can then be used for writing up. Other distinctions between thematic analysis and Template Analysis are that an initial template can be developed on a sub-set of the data before all the transcripts have been coded (Brooks et al., 2015). Furthermore, researchers are encouraged to identify themes at the early stages of analysis rather than towards the end when the coding is complete. A particular feature of Template Analysis, highlighted by Brooks et al.



(2015), is that *a priori* themes can be used in addition to the normal approach in thematic analysis of allowing themes to emerge from the data. *A priori* themes are identified prior to analysis taking place and can help to focus on key areas or the application of theory relevant to a study.

Based on the work of Brooks et al. (2015), and more specifically King and Brooks (2017), I decided to use Template Analysis within my research for the following reasons. Firstly, Template Analysis is recommended for handling large amounts of qualitative data which is essential with 31 respondents and multiple interviews. King and Brooks also advise that, through hierarchical coding where as many sub-themes as required can be developed, the technique encourages deeper coding than some approaches to thematic analysis. Through my interviews I had gathered rich, contextualised data that I wanted to analyse in depth so I felt this feature of the technique would help me to access a more complete understanding of my participants lived experiences. I also liked the fact that Template Analysis provides a structured format for the final presentation of the analysis (see Appendix J) which I felt would help identify themes for writing my findings chapters. Finally, King and Brooks discuss the application of Template Analysis in relation to different philosophical positions. King and Brooks comment that the generic nature of Template Analysis, allowing it to be used across a range of philosophical positions, can be considered a limitation as it does not prescribe a specific methodology and approach to analysis. However, this can be overcome by the researcher engaging and explicating their philosophical position at the start of the research process which I have outlined in Section 4.2. Consequently, King and Brooks identify Template Analysis as suitable for a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology as data can be interpreted through the themes and structure of the template to provide a contextualised analysis of the findings from the study.

To complete my Template Analysis I followed the seven-stage process outlined by King and Brooks (2017 p26). The stages are:

1. Familiarisation with the data.
2. Preliminary Coding
3. Clustering – into meaningful groups
4. Producing an initial template
5. Developing the template
6. Applying the final template
7. Writing up

As qualitative research generates rich and deep data (Mason, 2002) it has to be prepared and organised before analysis can take place (Cresswell, 2013). I therefore commenced my data analysis by re-reading my original transcripts, noting down on sticky paper any points of interest from each one (see photograph in Appendix I). In addition to the transcripts, after each interview I had written a summary of the interview noting key points and identifying the main issues being raised by respondents (see Appendix G). I therefore used these summaries, in conjunction with the original full transcripts, to complete my preliminary coding before clustering them into similar areas of interest to develop the themes in my initial Template Analysis. My interview summaries are an extension of King and Brooks' (2017) approach to applying Template Analysis, but I felt they helped me to handle the large volume of data. They also allowed me to focus more easily on patterns and themes emerging across the respondents as it was easier to check the same point across the summaries rather than returning to the original full transcripts each time.

King and Brooks (2017) recommend that a small sample of scripts should be used to produce the initial template so I selected five respondents from across the sample for the preliminary coding stage. The respondents selected comprised; two White working-class males where one lived at home and one lived at university, one working-class male of Bangladeshi heritage, and two White females with one identifying herself as middle class and the other working class. The five respondents chosen cannot be considered as being representative of the whole sample as not all background characteristics, such as females from a Pakistani heritage or middle-class males, were included. However, it was felt that the five chosen scripts would allow me to identify relevant codes and themes in the initial template that could be further developed, and additional codes added if necessary, when the remaining respondents were analysed.

Once I had completed the preliminary coding, and made all my notes on the first respondent, I clustered together similar themes to form my higher-order codes within the initial template. Higher-order codes are broad, overarching themes that provide an overview of a point of analysis (King, 2004). A number of these codes were *a priori* as they related to the themes used within my interview questions and the application of Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of capital, habitus and field. Other codes inductively emerged from my reading of the data and similarly to Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, codes were both descriptive, noting semantic content, and interpretive, providing analysis and meaning. King and Brooks (2017) state that the researcher can freely analyse data using both interpretive and descriptive codes to provide depth of analysis and understanding. They also comment that it is not necessary to make a distinction between interpretive and descriptive codes in the template. However, Brooks et al. (2015) warn that it is better to focus on descriptive coding initially to avoid abstraction and theorisation too early in the process before all the data has been fully considered and coded. I found this advice helpful in my analysis as I did focus on descriptive codes, but with the technique not specifically distinguishing between the two, it did allow me the freedom to note any point that I felt was relevant rather than being concerned about the nature of the code.

Coding within Template Analysis is hierarchical so under each higher-order code sub-themes, or lower-order codes, were developed to provide greater depth and richness in the analysis. As recommended by King and Brooks (2017) a maximum of four levels was used within the lower-order coding to fully develop a theme. Since Template Analysis is an iterative process (Brooks, et al., 2015) I repeated the reading and noting process with a further four respondents' data, adding further higher and lower-order codes as they emerged. From the first five transcripts I developed my initial template which is stage four in King and Brooks' (2017) process. I then returned to the remainder of my interview transcripts and summaries to complete stage five by repeating the process to add new codes that emerged from the data to arrive at a second version of my template which contained my full analysis. While the second version of my template was comprehensive there was repetition of themes under several headings. Additionally, I felt the structure did not allow the influences of class, habitus and gender to fully emerge. As recommended by King and Brooks (2017) at stage six I revised the order of the codes to reach the final template as shown in

Appendix J. Once the final template was complete I could progress onto writing up my findings to present my interpretation of student engagement with the graduate labour market during their final year of study and the first year after completing their degree.

Brooks et al. (2015) note that a limitation of Template Analysis is that with a large-size sample, as in the case of my research, analysis tends to focus across cases rather than within cases. To overcome this they recommend individual case summaries are used to illuminate a particular theme being analysed. To avoid losing the individual student experiences within the overall Template Analysis process, I decided to write a “story”, which could be considered as a detailed case summary, for each respondent as shown in Appendix H. These stories helped me to visualise, and recreate, each interviewee as a ‘person’ and therefore position them within one of my three data analysis chapters. An additional benefit from writing the stories was it brought me close to each individual respondent. As I am using a constructivist paradigm I felt being close to each respondent was important as it allowed me to engage with the data at a deep-level to be able to represent an individual’s understanding of their world (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, when introducing the student voice into my data analysis chapters, through quotes and illustrative examples, I could link them back to a particular respondent and set them into context.

On reflection I feel that Template Analysis was an effective method to choose for my research as it allowed me to complete a systematic and deep analysis of a large volume of qualitative data. Producing the template itself provided a cohesive and structured summary of themes with higher-order codes identifying overarching themes while lower-order coding provided depth for discussion within the findings. Extending the process to include the summaries and individual stories helped to bring me closer to the data which met one of my original desires for my thesis. When undertaking this research I had hoped to be able to come close to final year students to fully understand their perspectives of engaging with the graduate labour market and through my data analysis and findings I believe this was achieved.

#### 4.7.3 Ensuring Quality within Template Analysis

Flick (2007) posits that in qualitative studies it is the responsibility of the researcher to demonstrate quality through explicating their thought-processes and their practical application of research methods and techniques. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014 p64) similarly state that a researcher should question whether their work is “being conducted carefully, thoughtfully, and correctly in terms of some reasonable standards or established practice”. Qualitative researchers therefore need to demonstrate that their findings are trustworthy with Williams and Morrow (2009) identifying three points for consideration. Firstly, researchers should be able to confirm the integrity of their data by articulating all their research processes from design of a study through to data analysis. The integrity of my data has therefore been demonstrated through this methodology chapter and the supporting appendices. Secondly, researchers need to be able to communicate their findings clearly so that others can benefit from reading the work to stimulate debate, discussion and potentially further work in the area. The next three chapters present my findings. Finally, the researcher needs to convey the respondent’s meaning through their interpretations. My interpretations are contained in the next three chapters, but Mitchell, Boettcher-Sheard, Duque and Lashewicz (2018) believe this last point on representing meaning is difficult to achieve as a qualitative researcher can introduce bias within the findings. However, being reflexive can help a researcher to understand their influence on a study and the research findings. Appendix A is a reflexive account of my background and potential influence on the study.

King and Brooks (2017) provide guidance on ensuring quality within Template Analysis which I followed within my work. If there are multiple researchers on a study King and Brooks recommend that preliminary coding is completed independently with each researcher separately coding the transcripts and collating initial clusters to develop themes. Since I am the sole researcher on my PhD thesis this was not possible so I had to complete the coding independently. However, I could follow their advice in terms of maintaining an audit trail to record key decisions in my analysis and the development of my template. I based my audit trail on Halpern’s (1983 cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) recommendations and a copy is in Appendix K. Nowell et al. (2017) similarly advocate keeping an audit trail to provide evidence to support research decisions and demonstrate transparency in the research process. Finally in terms of

ensuring quality, King and Brooks (2017) recommend that when writing up the research findings thick descriptions are used which are supported by quotes from the participants to provide detail and indicate how the conclusions have been drawn from the data. This approach is also recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to avoid flat descriptions that simply present a basic understanding of the phenomena. In my writing up I was keen to present the student voice to not only add depth, but to also allow their points to be heard in their own words. Discussion within the findings chapters therefore provides rich and thick descriptions which are supported by participant quotes.

Ensuring quality within qualitative research can be difficult (Flick, 2007) so to summarise I have taken the following steps. I have been reflexive throughout my study (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) to be aware of my own position and influences on the research. I have also considered my ontological and epistemological position to understand my beliefs in relation to the creation of knowledge and understanding. When completing my chosen data analysis technique of Template Analysis I have applied recommended practice as advised by King and Brooks (2017), as well as maintaining an audit trail to demonstrate each stage in my decision making process. From the above, it is felt that appropriate action has been taken within this study to present trustworthy findings that characterise the experiences of my participants. The next section will now discuss how I applied Bourdieu into my data analysis and the use of his concepts to identify the three findings chapters.

#### 4.8 Applying Bourdieu in my Data Analysis

Grenfell (2012 p213) states that Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field and habitus "only make sense, therefore, when applied to practical research". Rather than forcing Bourdieu's concepts onto my data I used them as thinking tools to interpret student experiences. As recommended by Grenfell (2012), I also adopted Bourdieu's approach of taking a practical situation and exploring the gathered data. As a consequence I analysed the objective structures of the field of graduate employment as well as the subjective experiences of my respondents in engaging with the field during their final year of study and first year after graduation. To help me operationalise Bourdieu's concepts the stories I wrote for each respondent (see an example in Appendix H) were a key part of the data analysis process as they focused on each

student's holdings of capital, habitus and their level of engagement with the field. The next three sections will now discuss how I operationalised Bourdieu's concepts within my data analysis.

#### 4.8.1 Operationalising the Concept of Field

The two fields within this study are the higher education sector and the graduate labour market. The nature of higher education is discussed in Chapter Two Section 2.5.1 with Bathmaker (2015) commenting on the stratified and elitist nature of the field which impacts on undergraduate recruitment. All participants within my research attended the same institution, a post-1992 university located in the North of England. Grades required to enter the university are typically in the range of 120 UCAS points which equates to BBB at A-level (UCAS, 2017). Given the entry criteria, and the position of the institution in league tables, students attending the university in my study are more likely to be from a working-class background with little or no family history of participating in higher education and therefore, progression on to the graduate labour market. Student practice will be explored in the interviews taking this context into consideration

The second field in my research is the graduate labour market. Though it is linked to the higher education sector in terms of student progression upon completing their studies, it operates independently. However, a field is not a single entity as it is divided into multiple subfields (Thomson, 2012) where each industry sector, and potentially individual organisations, can set their own rules for entry and success. The nature of the graduate labour market is discussed in more detail in Section 3.5 of my literature review. Within my data analysis I wanted to establish the field from the students' perspective so the first three themes within my template focused on their understanding of the field and the different recruitment processes they had experienced as well as their level of engagement with the field. Barriers to entry is placed as theme four within the template as it crosses between analysis of the field and holdings of capital with points raised being discussed in the relevant section.

#### 4.8.2 Operationalising the Concept of Capital

Bourdieu (1984) views capital as a resource that is unequally distributed with the volume and composition of capital possessed by an individual being a source of power that influences their position in society. Forms of capital are discussed more fully in Chapter Two. To summarise, the forms of capital based on Bourdieu (1984) are firstly economic capital which relates to an individual's material goods that can be generated or inherited including income, property and overall wealth. Cultural capital, based on linguistic competence, manners, taste and preferences, manifests itself in an appreciation of cultural pursuits such as art, literature and theatre. In relation to employment the concept of cultural capital has been broadened to include transferable soft skills and interview skills. Social capital is the network of family, friends and contacts in the wider society that provide a relationship of mutual recognition that can be exploited to gain advantage. Finally, symbolic capital is designated from the effect of the other three forms of capital, indicating status and class as capital is only truly valuable when socially recognised (Crossley, 2012).

Within my analysis I will consider students' holdings of all four forms of capital and its effect upon their engagement with the graduate labour market. This is covered by themes four to ten within the template which focus on the respondents' capital holdings before analysing barriers faced in accessing the graduate labour market. Capital holdings considered include education, extracurricular activities, transferable skills and work experience. Social capital through support networks available was also analysed, and included family support as well as professional guidance from the university. Within themes four to ten student expectations of the graduate labour market and personal hopes for the future were also discussed as this helped to set the student experiences into context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasise the importance of setting research into context as a particular situation will influence the experiences being shared.

#### 4.8.3 Operationalising the Concept of Habitus

One of the challenges of identifying an individual's habitus is that it is invisible (Murdock, 2010). Davey (2009) describes it as an elusive, but valuable concept as it can be used to interrogate data to understand differences in practice. Maton (2012)



similarly advises that it is only possible to witness the effects of habitus within practice allowing the structure of the habitus to be revealed through interpretation. Since it cannot be directly observed, Bourdieu (1986/1987) recommends that researchers look for repetition of behaviours as these are indications of habitus influencing practice. However, Burke (2016 p29) warns that 'dispositions, values and norms are often so tacit they go unnoticed' so careful reading of the data is required. Within my data analysis I will be searching for repeated behaviours at an individual level as well as across the group.

As recommended by Reay (2004), I will also be questioning my data to examine how habitus can indicate dispositions relating to class, gender and ethnicity. Reay (2004) identified four ways in which habitus could be revealed. Firstly habitus can be embodied in every day actions and gestures such as standing, walking and speaking. Secondly, habitus can be demonstrated through agency with dispositions being "the products of opportunities and constraints framing the individual's earlier life experiences" (Reay, 2004 p433). Habitus can also be revealed through collective and individual trajectories with general observations of social position being made at a societal level and a more complex identification of habitus at an individual level depending on personal circumstances. Finally, the interplay between past and present leads to the development of an individual's habitus through socialisation. Occurring from childhood onwards there is the potential for habitus to change throughout life when an individual is exposed to new experiences. I will be looking for evidence of all four aspects of habitus within my data.

Behaviours that are compatible to a field, where an individual has a feel for the game, demonstrate practical mastery (Bourdieu, 1977). Deeply inculcated within the habitus, Bourdieu believes that practical mastery does not require agents to be conscious of their actions in relation to a field as their behaviours are internalised and "natural" (Strandbu & Steen-Johnson, 2014). Suggesting that action is unconscious raises criticisms of determinism and fails to acknowledge the role of reflection upon an agent's actions (Crossley, 2001). Based on Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Mouzelis (2007) posits that under every day circumstances agent's actions normally do occur naturally and are taken for granted. In a time of crisis though, where there is a lack of fit between dispositions and the field, reflexivity and strategic rationalising are required

for an agent to gain an advantageous position. The transition between the fields of higher education and graduate employment represents a time of potential crisis. The familiar disposition and behaviours of a student are different to those required in the workplace. Decoteau (2016) argues that where there is disjuncture between the field and an individual habitus, reflexivity can lead to social change. However, Adams (2006) points out that reflexivity and recognition of the agent's position does not necessarily mean they have the agency or desire to change their social position.

Rather than the critical reflexivity of social analysis that a researcher would undertake, Noble and Watkins (2003) prefer the term 'ordinary reflection' indicating a level of consciousness where an agent is aware of their actions and what they are capable of undertaking. Burke (2016 p27) refers to the presence of ordinary reflection as leading to symbolic mastery stating that:

“an individual who objectively understands what they have done points to a certain level of symbolic mastery, while understanding what they are capable of demonstrates their subjective expectations.”

Symbolic mastery is an indication of consciousness and cognitive processes taking place and will be most apparent when an agent is required to take action in relation to a field. The transition from higher education to the workplace is an opportunity for students to reflect upon their practice and demonstrate both their practical and symbolic mastery. Within my data analysis I will be searching for reflective behaviour by the respondents that demonstrates a conscious and objective understanding of their actions in relation to the field of graduate employment. In addition, their practical mastery will be indicated through successfully negotiating access to the field. Theme eleven within the template focused on the respondents' habitus with each of the influencing factors of class, gender and ethnicity being analysed.

The final theme in the template concentrated on analysing the interviews held approximately one year after graduation with field, capital and habitus all being incorporated across this theme. This was due to the final theme focusing on their experiences since graduating so it did not need to repeat earlier material.

#### 4.9 Identifying the Three Findings Chapters

In my template Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of field, capital and habitus are *a priori* codes (King & Brooks, 2017) as I was searching for their presence within my interview transcripts. In addition, themes also inductively emerged from my analysis particularly in the lower-order codes which explored points raised in greater detail. Higher-order inductive themes included barriers to graduate employment and personal hopes for the future. By repeatedly reading the interview transcripts, summaries and stories I believe the final template captured all the relevant themes and codes to support my three findings chapters identified below.

Within my analysis I wanted to understand and represent the students' "worlds of engagement" in relation to the graduate labour market. As previously discussed, I had initially assumed that all students would want to look for graduate-level work upon completing their studies. Once I started to interview my participants, I quickly realised that there was a wide variety of hopes and aspirations as well as personal circumstances influencing their level of engagement. Therefore, as a constructivist I wanted to enter and interpret their world and their experiences upon completing their studies and represent their lives within my findings.

From my analysis I identified three findings chapters. The first one, Chapter Five is titled "Fish out of Water" and discusses ten students who did not engage with the graduate labour market during their final year for a variety of reasons such as personal family circumstances or not having a clear career plan. The second findings chapter, Chapter Six, is "Between Two Worlds" and focuses on the experiences of ten students who engaged with the graduate labour market, but struggled to exert their agency. One of the hopes from attending university expressed by this group was to gain a higher-level job, but due to their disposition, capital holdings or knowledge in relation to the field they found it difficult to secure a graduate position. Chapter Six therefore explores their experiences and the challenges they faced when searching for work. The final findings chapter, Chapter Seven, is the "Game Players". This group of eleven students behaved strategically during their final year and in their approach to employment. The group still faced challenges along the way, but they used a variety of resources at their disposal to position themselves strategically to successfully enter the graduate labour market. The grouping of students under the three chapter

headings is an acknowledgement of the influence of Bourdieu's work upon my research. Bourdieu's work also influenced my analysis with his key concepts of field, capital and habitus being analysed in conjunction with the influence of class, gender and ethnicity amongst my respondents.

#### 4.10 Chapter Summary

This methodology chapter is an account of the research process adopted within my thesis. It firstly discussed ontology and epistemology before establishing my study within an interpretivist paradigm. I also discussed Bourdieu's theoretical position and my application of his concepts within my methodology. In the next part of the chapter I provided a narrative on my research methods firstly considering my reasons for choosing qualitative interviews before discussing the design of the interview questions and the conduct of the interviews. It is important to note the role of power within qualitative interviews so I discussed this along with other ethical considerations such as gaining the interviewee's consent to participate and university approval for my study. I then discussed my sample and the amendments I had to make due to not being able to access another university to compare students as originally planned. I also provided a rationale for selecting my participants including the breadth of respondents' backgrounds and degree subjects studied. In the chapter I then focused on my data analysis by explaining my reasons for choosing thematic analysis and more specifically Template Analysis. I have discussed how I applied the technique in practice and the different stages I undertook in order to interpret my respondents' experiences of engaging with the graduate labour market during their final year of study and their first year after graduation. I was searching for the influence of class, gender and ethnicity using Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus to provide a framework. My analysis led to the identification of the three findings chapters which now follow.

Throughout this chapter I have reflexively considered my position in relation to this study. My research journey has been enjoyable, but also challenging in terms of working through my philosophical perspective before applying it in practice through my data collection and analysis. At the early stages I faced difficulties when I could not access another university. I managed to overcome these and focus my research on a single institution, but across a range of degree subjects studied. The documentation

supporting my research is contained within a series of appendices, and along with this chapter represents the research decisions and approach taken in my thesis. I will now begin to discuss my findings in the next chapter which is called “Fish out of Water” as it considers the experiences of ten students who did not engage with graduate recruitment processes during their final year of study.

## **Chapter Five – “Fish out of Water”- Little or No Engagement with the Graduate Labour Market during the Final Year of Study**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents my analysis of the first group of respondents who have been classified as “Fish out of Water”. Bourdieu (1984) uses this term to refer to agents with a habitus which is incompatible to a field. As discussed in Chapter Two the university sector has grown into a mass education system with the Department for Education (2017d) remaining committed to higher education as a means of enhancing job opportunities to improve social mobility. Tomlinson (2008) believes that changes in the sector have led to students adopting a more instrumental approach to education viewing it as a career investment rather than a learning experience for itself. Since they did not engage with the labour market during their final year I have referred to this group as “Fish out of Water” as due to their personal decisions they may not meet government expectations of securing higher-level work upon graduation (Department of Education, 2017d).

In my data analysis I will be addressing the research questions presented in Chapter One to meet the aim of my thesis which is to critically explore the influences of class, gender and ethnicity upon student engagement with the graduate labour market and their early career experiences. In the first section I will identify the respondents classified as “Fish out of Water”. I have divided the reasons for them not engaging with the graduate labour market into three themes; a lack of career plan, personal circumstances and academic reasons. I will discuss the reasons for placing each student into a specific category through the lens of habitus exploring their experiences during their final year and their first year after graduation. I will also consider their understanding of the field and holdings of capital in relation to graduate-level employment. I will draw the chapter together with a summary of the barriers faced by the members of this group in relation to the graduate labour market.

## 5.2 Research Participants Classified as “Fish out of Water”

I have classified ten respondents as “Fish out of Water” with the group comprising six females and four males. Ethnic minority students were disproportionately represented forming 30% of this category in comparison to 19% of the total sample as the group included two females from a British Pakistani heritage and one male from a British Chinese heritage. The remaining seven respondents were all White British. In terms of social class, six of the respondents were middle class and four were working class. The background of each respondent is noted in Table 5.1 along with a brief summary of the reason for being classified as “Fish out of Water”. In the following section I will firstly explore the experiences of the students with a lack of career plan.

Table 5.1 Research Participants Classified as “Fish out of Water”

Interview Number	Name	Reasons for being in the category
4	<b>Nasreen</b> Female Middle class British Pakistani	<b>Personal circumstances</b> Not under pressure from her family to find work. Focused on studies during final year to achieve high grades. First role was a temporary contract nine months after graduation
8	<b>James</b> Male Working class British Chinese	<b>Focusing on their Degree</b> Focusing on studies as poor A-level grades a potential barrier. Also no engagement during final year due to “laziness”. One year after graduation unemployed and helping out in family take-away business
10	<b>Mark</b> Male Middle class White British	<b>Lack of career plan</b> Part-time job and lived at home throughout university which continued after graduation. One year on beginning to look for graduate roles.
13	<b>Sam</b> Male Working class White British	<b>Focusing on their Degree</b> Waiting for results before making a decision to continue studying or work. Ideally wants to do a research masters.
18	<b>Ayesha</b> Female Middle class British Pakistani	<b>Personal circumstances</b> Not under pressure from family to find work so decided to wait until after Ramadan in July before looking for employment. Worked on a series of temporary contracts after graduating.

21	<b>Lydia</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Personal circumstances</b> After graduating marrying long-term partner who is in the armed forces. Due a new posting so does not know where she will be living, planning to immediately start a family
23	<b>Jane</b> Female Middle class White British	<b>Lack of career plan</b> Struggled with aspects of her degree so unsure on work after graduation. Unemployed at the end of her final year so completing a masters to develop skills
25	<b>Chloe</b> Female Middle class White British	<b>Lack of career plan</b> Working part-time and living at home. No idea on work upon graduation so extended her time in education by studying for a masters. Continued to live at home and work in the same part-time job.
27	<b>Heather</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Personal circumstances</b> Difficult family background, but now living with partner. Waiting for him to secure work to determine where they will live.
29	<b>Brett</b> Male Middle class White British	<b>Lack of career plan</b> No clear career plan or relevant work experience. Also identifies himself as having a lazy attitude towards looking for work. Lived at home while at university.

### 5.3 Lack of Career Plan

Bourdieu (1977) describes habitus as a system of durable dispositions that influence an individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Habitus is the embodiment of cultural norms and is shaped by personal background and socialisation from childhood onwards (Silva, 2015). Habitus is invisible (Murdock, 2010) so it is only possible to witness its effects within practice (Maton, 2012). I will therefore be exploring the influences of class, gender and ethnicity through the lens of habitus by interpreting student behaviours in relation to the graduate labour market.

The first group of four respondents; Mark, Jane, Chloe and Brett, all cited a lack of career plan as their reason for not engaging with the graduate labour market. Within the group there were differences in gender with two males and two females, but all were White British and identified themselves as middle class on the basis that they believed their parents had good jobs and that their families were financially comfortable. Blanden and Machin's (2013) findings that students from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to attend university fits with this group as they had



expected to progress to university from high school viewing it as an automatic extension of their education. Crawford and Greaves (2015) similarly found that among White students those from a middle class background were more likely to attend than White working-class students. On his progression Mark commented:

Mark: “Going to university was probably due to the fact of not knowing what I wanted to do more than anything ... I thought it’s not worth looking for a job, it’s probably worthwhile going to university”.

While Jane said:

Jane: “It’s a bad way to look at it, but at the time university was the next step after my A-levels and then when I get to university I’ll reconsider”.

Noaman et al. (2016) found that young people often struggle to decide what subject to study at university. Applicants are expected to search for their own informational capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) to support decision making which can be difficult as UCAS (2018) lists over 50 000 courses from 395 providers. When choosing a degree, UCAS advise students to take a subject that they enjoy, but to also consider graduate career options as some roles require specific qualifications and experience. Lane (2013) comments that the UK education system forces career decisions at too young an age. With a wide range of options available, for both university study and long-term employment afterwards, it is challenging for young people to research and understand all the careers available to them leaving many undecided on their future. Haynes et al. (2013) believe this difficulty is exacerbated by an inadequate careers provision for 14-19 year olds with long-term opportunities often being limited by poor decisions in the earlier stages of education where students have not chosen a subject that is a specific requirement for a particular field that they later decide to enter.

Mark, Brett and Jane had chosen to study their favourite subject from A-level at university enrolling on Business Management, Sociology and Drama respectively. In contrast, Chloe had initially applied to study primary teacher training, but she had not checked the entry requirements on UCAS and did not realise that she should have studied A-levels in core school subjects such as Maths and English. She said:

Chloe: “if I’d known I wanted to be a teacher, I would have chosen different A-levels not because I was interested in them, but just because of the job I wanted.”

When she did not receive any offers for teacher training Chloe chose to study Sociology as it had also been her favourite subject at college.

Mark and Brett’s mothers were keen for them to attend university as they had not had the opportunity themselves, but they also wanted them to live at home for financial and personal reasons. Commenting on his mum’s influence Mark said:

Mark: “I wanted to stay here for university ... my mum was worried about me moving away ...What’s the point of going elsewhere to do the same course when I could get a perfectly good course locally.”

Chloe similarly continued to live at home describing herself as a ‘home bird’ and being close to her family so she also did not like the idea of moving away. Cashmore (2017) reports that due to rising fees and living costs increasing numbers of students are choosing to live at home and commute. While Marsh (2014) found students also chose to remain at home to benefit from family support networks to help cope with the pressure of studying.

Jane was the only one to move from home which was five miles away in a neighbouring town. While she believed her parents were pleased she moved away, she said:

Jane: “there’s like a little voice at the back of my head saying they don’t want you to go very far.”

After graduation all four planned to live at home or close by to maintain their family support network. Again Mark’s focus was mainly on cost commenting:

Mark: “it has to make financial sense”.

While Chloe was focusing on family support saying:

Chloe: “I live at home with my parents, I’ve lived here all my life, but I know that if I get a house myself I wouldn’t be too far away.”

Having discussed their background I will now consider their engagement with the graduate labour market.

### 5.3.1 Engagement with the Graduate Labour Market by Respondents Lacking a Career Plan

Bridgstock’s (2009) model of graduate attributes emphasises the importance of career management skills in researching different job roles. As noted by Thomson (2012), a field is not a single entity so each sector and organisation within the graduate labour market has its own entry criteria. Models of employability emphasise individuals being responsible for their own futures, but Lane (2013) believes young people require better support and guidance to research and decide upon a sector they would like to enter. At the start of their final year this group had no clear ideas of potential fields they would like to work in leaving them without focus and a sense of direction (Shariff, 2011).

Parental support is multi-faceted (Kenny & Medvide, 2013) and includes emotional, financial and informational support. Ginevra et al.’s (2015) research indicates that the earlier parents become involved in their children’s career decision making the better it is for their vocational development. However, Adegoke (2014) warns against relying on parental careers advice as they may have good intentions, but their limited information can act as a barrier. For this group their parents were supportive of their continuing education, but due to limited knowledge of the graduate market they had not been able to offer practical advice in relation to careers and applying for jobs. Discussing his parent’s support Mark commented:

Mark: “My Dad’s not in a position to give advice about it, he kind of avoids it whereas my Mum she will be interested in what I’m doing. I’ve shown my CV to my mum and she’s yeah great, but ... get someone else to check it.”

Jane’s mother was the only graduate parent in the group that could potentially have shared her experience. Jane however, would like to work in the theatre, possibly

backstage or in administration as she no longer enjoyed performing herself. The field of theatre has specific rules for entry and progression and since her mum's degree was in textiles she was unable to provide relevant advice.

Jane: "They are really supportive ... I've got my mum to read it (CV), but I probably should go to careers at some point because they are really good for it."

McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) identified that choosing to live in one location acts as a structural barrier upon employability as it spatiality limits available job opportunities. To widen the field respondents were prepared to travel for work with commuting times varying between thirty minutes to an hour each way. Research by Faggian, et al. (2013) however, found that graduate jobs are not equally distributed geographically with some sectors being centred in a specific location. This could be an additional barrier for Jane if she decides she would like to work in the theatre as she said:

Jane: "There are jobs in London that I am terrified of applying for because it's London ... London scares me."

On entering their final year Mark and Chloe had considered applying for the graduate schemes offered by leading organisations, but with no career plan they could not decide which to apply for. Such schemes normally involve a training period to develop graduates skills and knowledge of the organisation (Targetjobs, n.d.a). Chloe thought a graduate scheme would provide her with more time to decide on her future career. She framed our conversation in terms of the benefits they would offer her saying:

Chloe: "I'd prefer a graduate scheme because they seem the best to go for, more opportunities for you and more money. You go into different sectors of the business and find what is best for you. At the end of the training you can choose what you want to do which I feel is quite useful especially as I don't know what I want to do."

Mark similarly views the schemes as providing opportunities for progression, though, he was concerned that once he had secured his first graduate role it could be difficult to switch between fields if he did not like the industry. He therefore believed it was

important for him to take his time to choose carefully in the first place; an approach which he described as “picky”.

Brett was equally undecided on his future commenting:

Brett: “I’m still kind of wondering where to go next you know. I’m sort of aiming for a proper job or maybe volunteer work with charities or I’ll be honest just a little small job to fund my way.”

Chloe also did not know which industry she would like to work in, but she adopted a different attitude to Mark describing herself as:

Chloe: “a bit lost with applying for jobs as I think gosh I don’t actually know what I want to do. I think it’s going to have to be a little bit of trial and error ... I mean have a job, see how it goes and if it’s wrong apply for another job. I know it sounds silly, but I honestly don’t know what I want to do though.”

As already noted by Lane (2013) it is not easy for young people to understand future employment opportunities with the education system tending to focus on academic achievement rather than supporting their long-term transition into the workplace (Haynes et al., 2013). This group’s primary motivation was to find work that was satisfying. However, with limited knowledge of the field and job roles available this group were struggling to understand their position in relation to potential careers and as a consequence they did not engage with the graduate labour market during their final year.

### 5.3.2 Capital Holdings of Respondents Lacking a Career Plan

A field is a socially constructed space with an individual’s position being based on their dispositions through habitus as well as their holdings of capital. Bourdieu (1984) considered capital to be resources at an individual’s disposal and the concepts have been discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. Through his work Bourdieu (1984) identified many forms of capital with the main ones considered to be economic, cultural

and social capital leading to symbolic capital as holdings are only valuable when recognised by society (Crossley, 2012).

Regarding economic capital I have already noted that three of the group lived at home. Additionally, Mark, Chloe and Jane had part-time work which meant none felt under financial pressure, and therefore at a point of crisis, to find immediate work. Reflecting on this in the final interview Mark said:

Mark:            “if I’d have been living away it would have been more of a kick because I would have been struggling more financially.”

Capital is only valuable when symbolically recognised by others to allow positioning in the field (Moore, 2012). With a competitive graduate labour market Jackson (2007) found that social skills and non-merit characteristics are increasingly important at interview. As so many applicants hold the same level of academic qualifications recruiters use alternative factors, such as work experience and extracurricular activities, as a method of distinguishing between them. Jane, Mark and Chloe all had part-time jobs in retail, but only Jane was positive about her learning from the role. Mark commented on conversations with colleagues saying:

Mark:            “People who’ve worked there a long-time say get out while you can because you get stuck. There’s people there with similar degrees to mine and they’ve got to supervisor roles and then been stuck there.”

Gbadamosi et al. (2015) believe that working in a low-skilled job can improve employability providing the experience is valued and the skills gained can be articulated in relation to future career aspirations. Capital is valuable when agents are able to mobilise it for their personal advantage (Devine & Savage, 2005), but Mark and Chloe had a low opinion of their part-time jobs. They felt they had gained few skills from their work instead viewing it as a source of income while at university with limited opportunities for training. This supports Kim et al.’s (2016) findings that low-skilled workers are less able to recognise their personal development due to the more practical nature of their training. After graduation they did not want to remain in the field as they thought it did not provide the best long-term prospects for an individual holding a degree.

Bourdieu (1984) classed cultural capital as an appreciation of the arts, music and literature. In relation to the graduate labour market this interpretation has been extended to include undertakings such as work experience and extracurricular activities that enhance a student's employability by developing skills, attributes and abilities viewed as valuable by an employer (Clarke et al., 2015). While respondents in this group participated in various activities such as football, dance and music as children none had partaken regularly in any university-based extracurricular activities contradicting Stuart et al.'s (2011) findings that middle-class students are the most likely to participate in such opportunities. Jane's drama course did require her to participate in regular productions that would have developed cultural capital relevant to the field and may have limited her time for other activities.

When I asked Mark his reasons for not being involved in extracurricular activities he paused for a long time before saying:

Mark: "I wish I'd probably done those kind of things ... I think I sound a bit boring. It's not much to boast about on my CV."

Mark said that at the time he "just wasn't interested" in the activities available. He commented that he regretted his lack of involvement as he felt his holdings of capital were now limited in comparison to other graduates.

Living at home may have also contributed to Chloe, Mark and Brett's decision not to participate in extracurricular activities as they lived a distance from campus. For example, Brett had initially joined the Archery Society, but with meetings twice a week, one on a Thursday evening and the other on Saturday morning, he found it difficult to attend commenting:

Brett: "I had to travel and I had to stay back later on a Thursday when I would have had free time and it was just getting into uni and having the extra travel on Saturday's when I could just be studying or hanging out with other people really."

Brett had not joined in activities at college either, again citing the reason as having to commute from a neighbouring town so he did not want to stay behind after lessons.

Social capital is another key form comprising contacts and networks that can be used to gain advantage in the field (Moore, 2012). All four respondents maintained close family ties with three living at home and Jane seeing her parents living in the next town on a regular basis. As already mentioned this support was emotional rather than practical in relation to the graduate labour market.

Social capital is particularly important in the field of theatre as Jane explained:

Jane:            “you start with networking and going to events and getting your name out ... volunteering as an assistant is a start to building up trust”.

During her degree Jane had not built a network of contacts in the theatre to use to her advantage. She did have access to social capital through her part-time job in a supermarket which she was considering using as a fall-back position saying:

Jane:            “I would apply for that (management trainee position) because I can get all the skills and experience that way which I can take into a job in the arts world if one becomes available.”

Mark and Chloe also had contacts at work, but with neither wanting to remain in the retail sector they could not necessarily take advantage of them. Chloe commented:

Chloe:           “With a degree I think I should aim higher than that.”

In comparison, Brett's only work experience was from a two week compulsory placement at school at an optician's shop. While at university he had tried to find a part-time job, but from feedback he was conscious that he does not present himself well at interview finding the situations to be socially awkward.

A source of support available to the entire group was the university careers service, but none of them attended during their final year based on them not actively looking for work. Jane commented that if she had an interview she would ask careers to hold a practice session with her first in order not to “crumble”. While Mark said:

Mark:            “I haven't really sought help from outside ... there's no one in my family who has done this before so it's a bit of a new concept to us.”



Pasero (2016) found that first generation university students were more passive in their careers research and were also less likely to attend the careers service. She noted that from their cultural and social habitus they were unaware of the long-time scales required to develop a career mind set to support their transfer from education to employment. A university careers service can provide informational capital across a range of fields, and for students without a career plan they can help them match their skills to potential sectors (Adegoke, 2014).

A further shared disposition amongst this group was a sense that they were entitled to choose their career upon graduation rather than being forced to accept sub-degree level work. On this Chloe commented:

Chloe:            “I think I should aim higher than that. If not there wouldn’t be any point doing my degree otherwise. Obviously you’ve got the first couple of years working towards getting a position with a less pay cheque, but after then I think you should be on good wages, a good position.”

All four would like work that is satisfying. For example, Jane wanted a job working with people rather than being “stuck” behind a desk while Mark said:

Mark:            “I want to find something I enjoy.”

Their long-term aspirations and expectations of employment appear to match a middle-class habitus in that they believed they should choose the nature of their work. However, their practice and low-holdings of work related capital did not place them at an advantage. Taking Maton’s (2012) statement that practice can be understood by analysing an agent’s relationship between field and habitus there appears to be a mismatch for these respondents leading to hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1977) as they did not understand or engage with the graduate labour market in their final year. Tomlinson’s (2008) research indicates that middle-class students are increasingly reflexive while at university using their holdings of capital to position themselves in relation to the graduate labour market. However, Laughland-Booy et al.’s (2015) work contradicts this as they found that students from a privileged background were less reflexive than their working-class peers who were conscious that their social position may limit their opportunities. They concluded that an expectation to secure high-level work at a future

point accompanied by access to economic capital protected middle-class students from the risk of not securing jobs immediately upon graduation.

Laughland-Booy et al's. (2015) findings are more applicable to this group of respondents as due their advantageous background none had reached a point of crisis requiring them to undertake ordinary reflection (Noble & Watkins, 2003) leading to symbolic mastery (Burke, 2016). Reflexivity is also a key stage in the employability models (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) allowing students to understand their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the workplace. Except for acknowledging their academic qualifications, due to their lack of reflection and a career plan, the group were unable to articulate their wider skills and abilities in relation to the graduate labour market.

### 5.3.3 A Year after Graduation for Respondents Lacking a Career Plan

Moving from education into employment is a major transition in life that requires a reconstruction of identity from being a student to being an employed graduate (Holmes, 2015). This group continued to hold onto their familiar student identity finding it difficult to perceive themselves in a job role. Catching up with the respondents a year after completing their studies both Jane and Chloe had stayed on at the same university to complete a masters degree as they had not secured graduate-level work. I did not hear from Brett a year after, but he had also been considering a masters commenting:

Brett: "I might go back to uni for a masters and take a year out before properly focusing on my career."

Prospects (2017) reports an increase in the number of students continuing on to postgraduate study. This is partly due to an improved funding system, but also students feel that more specialist knowledge will help their entry into a competitive labour market. Malik (2018) advises that postgraduate study should be part of a long-term career plan though, rather than a way of postponing work. Since Chloe, Jane and Brett were undecided on future jobs they adopted this latter point of view believing that further studies would give them more time to decide as well as additional qualifications.

Mark had also seen little change since graduation as he was still working at the supermarket on the same part-time hours as when he was a student. Realising that time was passing by and he had not moved on he had recently started to reflect on his situation and look for graduate work. Living at home he was also being pressured by his mother as she believed he was capable of achieving more in the workplace than he had to date. Mark was still undecided on an industry, but had applied to a range of companies asking for a business degree. His practice was improving in terms of the initial stages as he had progressed through to several interviews. Regarding his experience at interview he said:

Mark:            “I seem to be getting interviews. I’ve had a few telephone interviews and every time I seem to be getting through those ok. It seems to be the face-to-face interviews, more the competency based ones that are a struggle.

A year after graduation Mark’s habitus appeared to be changing to fulfil his ambitions of a graduate-level job. Through reflection he had decided upon potential roles and actively engaged in the graduate labour market with a number of applications. Feeling that his low-skilled work experience limited his examples at interview he had also volunteered at work for tasks with additional responsibility to strengthen his position. In our final interview Mark presented a more confident disposition and from his recent experience he hoped to secure work soon.

#### 5.3.4 Summary of Respondents Lacking a Career Plan

Habitus marks an individual’s position in social space with those from the same social group tending to share the same practice (Robbins, 2000). The real world is complex (Reay, 2004) so being from a middle-class background does not necessarily mean students will exhibit expected behaviours. As middle-class students this group would be expected to use their social and cultural capital to provide themselves with an advantage in the labour market (Bathmaker et al., 2013), and as White British middle-class males Mark and Brett would be expected to be the least likely to face barriers to graduate employment (Okay-Somerville & Scholaris, 2017). However, all four did not engage with the graduate labour market due to a lack of career plan which supports Burke’s (2017) findings that entitled middle-class students holding high aspirations are

prepared to wait for the right opportunity rather than entering a field at a lower level to later progress to a position that meets their expectations. In addition, the group were also struggling to develop their identity capital (Tomlinson, 2017) to place themselves in the field of graduate employment rather than the field of education.

The group however, contradict a number of other studies. For example, Stuart et al.'s (2011) research that middle class students are more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities and Tomlinson's (2008) work on middle-class students being reflexive to position themselves in the field. While Mark was not reflexive during his final year his behaviour changed when six months after graduation he was still in the same part-time job at the supermarket.

A key factor influencing this group's lack of engagement with the graduate labour market was their socio-economic background. Having followed a middle-class trajectory of expecting to progress through their education to university (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) their situation stalled as they completed their studies. They believed they were entitled to a graduate-level job, but their lack of career plan placed them in a weak objective position in relation to the field as could not decide where to focus their applications. They were also only able to articulate their subjective expectations in broad terms such as having a "good job" (Chloe) and being a "manager" (Mark). However, being able to access family economic capital meant they were able to take time to consider their future employment rather than being forced to a point of crisis to accept any job in order to live.

While this group expressed a middle-class habitus through their aspirations in terms of choosing the nature of their employment their actions did not support their transition from education into the graduate labour market. Two key barriers to their employability were that they did not engage with career development learning and they were not reflective upon their skills and abilities in relation to the graduate labour market (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Without identifying a sector to enter they found it difficult to complete the early stages of recognising their employability.

While individuals possess agency to change their position in relation to social structures (Bourdieu, 1977) a lack of career plan had constrained this group. Their uncertainty about potential future careers stemmed from school and like many young

people they had not received careers support to help them decide which degree to study at university in relation to long-term job opportunities (Haynes et al., 2013). While the group were at an advantage in social space (Bourdieu, 1984) through their economic capital, they were unable to draw on practical advice from their parents meaning they felt isolated in trying to decide upon their future. Additionally, they had not yet taken advantage of professional careers advice at university, possibly due to their poor experience of careers from school. Without guidance from family, the education system, professional services, and experience of the workplace, it is difficult for young people to understand the opportunities available to them (Roberts, 2009) making it hard for many to take their first steps on the career ladder. In the next section I will now discuss students who did not engage with the graduate labour market due to personal circumstances.

#### 5.4 Respondents Not Engaging due to Personal Circumstances

Through intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), respondents in the second cluster faced a combination of background factors that could have influenced their actions upon graduation. All were female with Lydia and Heather being from a White British working-class background while Nasreen and Ayesha were middle class from a British Pakistani heritage. Rather than being motivated by employment they were influenced by factors in their personal lives that had to be accommodated before they could consider their next steps after university. Their reasons for not engaging with the graduate labour market indicated a gendered habitus that related to marriage or partnerships, but in slightly different contexts due to their individual background factors. Bourdieu (2001) believed that gender divisions are socially constructed using biological differences to legitimise a male's dominant position in society and the family. Deeply engrained through habitus, gender divisions continue to be reproduced (Arnott, 2002). Women are the most likely to accommodate family responsibilities in their employment plans (Lyonette, 2015) which often means compromise and occupational downgrading due to structural barriers imposed by working practices (Metcalf, 2009).

Before discussing their reasons for not engaging with the graduate employment I want to note that all four respondents valued their experience of gaining a degree viewing it as a personal achievement in its own right (McArthur, 2011). Lydia commented:

Lydia: "I'll have the degree for the rest of my life."

Supporting Tomlinson's (1997) findings that ethnic minority parents value higher education, Ayesha and Nasreen's decision to continue to university had been influenced by their family. Ayesha said:

Ayesha: "It's important to my mum that all of us are qualified because she's from Pakistan and they don't get that opportunity. My mum wanted us to make the best of opportunities for our lives."

I will firstly discuss Lydia and Heather's experience of gender in relation to their engagement with the graduate labour market.

#### 5.4.1 The Gendered Habitus of White Working-class Females

Canetto et al. (2012) found that female graduates incorporate their partner's career goals into their own work plans, though in contrast, males only focus on themselves. Lydia and Heather's reason for not engaging supports this finding as they had delayed looking for work to fit around their partner's employment. Both had been with their current partner for at least four years and had long-term plans together that included marriage and children.

Due to her partner being in the military Lydia was marrying in the summer so that they would be allowed to live together in army accommodation as army rules only recognised relationships upon marriage. As her future husband was in line for a new posting Lydia did not know where she would be living as the army also controlled where they would be sent. Having moved away from home to attend university Lydia appeared unconcerned about the location of her next home commenting:

Lydia: "I don't know where I'm going to live in the world so I can't look for a job yet."

Besides marriage Lydia was further focusing on family commitments by saying she planned to have a baby within the next year. She would then look for work that would fit around her family at a later stage saying:

Lydia: "I'll look for a job, but it won't be a career. It will literally just be a job so I'm not bored."

Lydia had studied Fashion and Textile Management at university which was an all-female course and she explained that the fashion industry she would eventually like to enter is also female dominated. Huppatz (2012) found that due to a gendered habitus women were more likely to be drawn into careers where there was already a significant number of female workers. Lydia further demonstrated her gendered habitus through her part-time work in a bridal boutique. Commenting on her feelings towards the work she said:

Lydia:            “I love it. It’s lovely and you are just sharing the most special moment with these people. I think it’s the emotional thing ... being part of this emotional thing is amazing.”

Sykes and Brace-Govern (2015) describe the purchase of a wedding dress as a “feminine shopping ritual” where the retail assistants, who are also usually female, are integral to the process. As she was marrying herself Lydia felt immersed in the industry and said she may continue in this area of fashion in the future.

Analysing the impact of being a military wife, Jervis (2018) found that they had to frequently compromise their work to accommodate their husband’s moves, making it difficult to establish a career. Lydia had taken this into consideration as, from her degree and work experience, she had a good understanding of job roles within the field of fashion. She explained that while many roles in the field are centred in London, she would ideally like to work in merchandising which is undertaken within individual stores. Providing her husband was based near a major shopping centre she thought there would be job opportunities available.

From all the respondents in the “Fish out of Water” group Lydia had the highest capital holdings in terms of work experience as she had completed a year-long sandwich placement as part of her degree. Placements are associated with improved employment opportunities (Brooks & Youngson, 2016; Helyer, & Lee, 2014) and Lydia was confident that when she was ready to search for work she would be able to secure a job easily. She said:

Lydia:            “I think it (placement) will help me get a job quicker ... I applied for placement schemes so I’m feeling confident with it as I got through.”

In contrast, Heather had the lowest-level of capital holdings in the group impacting upon her employability. She had no paid work experience and only six days voluntary experience from her degree with a centre supporting the visually impaired. Heather had not looked for work either as she was also prioritising her partner's employment as he was similarly graduating that year. Since he had studied a science-based degree Heather felt he was better placed to secure higher-level work than her. He was applying for jobs in various locations so she said:

Heather: "I'm going to wait for him to get a job then start applying."

Heather had faced family difficulties during her childhood. From the age of 15 she had cared for her mother during a period of illness while simultaneously looking after her young brother who was only a few months old at the time. Due to caring she had missed college which had impacted on her A-level grades gaining a C and two D's. Ideally Heather would have liked a gap year before university to decide on her future studies, but due to little economic capital in her family Heather explained that her mother had told her:

Heather: "Either you go to uni or you get a job because basically I can't afford for you to live here otherwise. So I went to uni because I was like what jobs are there? I panicked."

Heather had taken Sociology at university. From topics studied, in conjunction with her own experiences, she had decided she would like to work with disadvantaged people, particularly the homeless commenting:

Heather: "I really want to help people who are disadvantaged. I know that I want to help others and I can't do that working in a shop."

Before she could realise her job ambitions Heather recognised the need to improve her employability skills in relation to the sector so she planned to volunteer with a homeless service provider or charity. However, with no family economic capital to draw on she would have to volunteer alongside working. Heather described the jobs she planned to apply for once she knew where she would be living saying:



Heather: “I’ll apply for cleaning, retail ... I’ve looked at apprenticeships in administration. Anything at the minute as long as I can fit in at some point the volunteering I want to do. If I get in at a volunteer-level hopefully I will be able to work my way in to a paid position as I collect experience.”

The Women and Work Commission (2006) describe the jobs that Heather mentioned as traditional women’s work with the sectors being horizontally segregated and female dominated (Wood, 2008) due to their low-skill and low-pay. Lydia was also planning to work in retail, though, a merchandiser is a specialist role which requires specific knowledge through work experience or qualifications.

Gendered norms of behaviour can limit a woman’s capacity for agency in the field of work with limitations being due to two main reasons; male power structures or women lowering their own outlook (Munoz et al., 2005). Skeggs’ (1997) work, focusing upon the lives of White working-class women, found that due to prioritising the needs of other family members a gendered division of labour structured their position in the home and available work opportunities. Lydia and Heather were also experiencing limitations in their choices due to taking into account their partners work location which may impact upon the type of work available when they search for themselves.

Contacting these respondents a year after graduation I did not hear back from Heather. As planned Lydia was expecting her first child and intended to focus on her family for the foreseeable future. She had not worked since leaving university. Lydia and Heather’s personal reasons for delaying looking for work were influenced by a traditional social view of prioritising male partner’s work over their own. I will now discuss Nasreen and Ayesha’s circumstances which were influenced by gendered and cultural expectations relating to their religion.

#### 5.4.2 Influences of Gender and Ethnicity on a Feminine Habitus

Ayesha and Nasreen similarly provided personal reasons for not engaging with the labour market that involved family and marriage, though, for them this was a future, rather than immediate, prospect. The primary influence on their gendered expectations related to their ethnicity and culture as both explained they were practising Muslims.

While their parents were happy for them to work in the short-term they were expected to prioritise marriage over a career. Nasreen commented:

Nasreen: “with girls we usually get married quite young so I wouldn’t mind not getting a job. My parents would never pressure me into getting a job ... I think marriage is more important to them.”

While Ayesha said:

Ayesha: “Some people think being a girl and being Muslim I should be married by now but my family are not in a rush. I would say in a few years when I’m 25 is about right.”

Further illuminating the role of gender in her culture, Nasreen explained that higher career expectations were placed upon her younger brothers. This is in line with Levant et al.’s (2018) research indicating that Muslim fathers set their sons high standards for academic achievement and success in the workplace. Nasreen commented:

Nasreen: “I think it’s because I’m a girl, with my brothers it’s completely different. I think they would prefer it if my brother’s got a job rather than me. My Dad is sterner with them anyway because they are boys ... it’s more important for them to be earning a living and do well.”

Bourdieu (2001) believed that “masculine domination” was perpetuated through the cultural arbitrary forming a gendered hierarchical order that is still present in modern society. Alexander and Wezel (2011) found that increasing levels of education and participation in the workplace had reduced patriarchal influence on young Muslim women. However, they also found that traditional gendered expectations of males and females were more likely to be present in families practising Islam. While Nasreen and Ayesha appear to be following this aspect of cultural practice it must be noted that not every Muslim family will follow traditional gendered expectations.

A further cultural and religious belief on their decision not to look for work until later was due to them both observing Ramadan which fell immediately after graduation that year. Ayesha said:

Ayesha: “it will be even harder to work during Ramadan because I will be fasting in July, I’ll wait until after Ramadan to start applying.”

Family was important to Nasreen and Ayesha. They had both lived at home while at university and planned to continue doing so until married. They also spent part of their leisure time with their family with Nasreen commenting:

Nasreen: “My family is important to me . At a weekend we go out for meals or shopping and on a Sunday I usually go and see my grandparents both my Dad’s parents and my Mum’s parents as they live nearby.”

Both felt supported by their family social network. While they were not under pressure to find work immediately they did want a job to occupy their time and to have a degree of financial independence. Ayesha said:

Ayesha: “Some families say you can do your education, but afterwards you can stay at home, we don’t want you working. Whereas my family don’t want me sitting at home, anything is better than sitting at home.”

Ayesha had taken a Youth and Community Studies degree as she enjoyed working with young people. She explained that experience in the youth sector is important for developing employability so as part of her degree she had volunteered with a local community group from which she was offered a job leading a weekly two-hour activity class for young Muslim girls. She was also involved in another community group where she sat on the Board of Trustees as its youth representative. Experiences such as these enhanced Ayesha’s cultural and social capital on her CV (Bathmaker et al., 2013) which could be symbolically valuable when she applied for jobs as volunteering in the youth sector can lead to paid employment.

In our interview Ayesha was lively and talkative. In contrast, Nasreen was more subdued saying:

Nasreen: “I’m really quiet, I’m not very confident, I keep to myself.”

Due to her quiet disposition Nasreen said she did not feel confident enough to become involved in extracurricular activities at university or in her community, preferring to

spend her free time at home. As she progressed through university she became aware of her lack of capital in relation to the workplace so Nasreen had undertaken a three-month unpaid internship the previous summer in the marketing department for a large retailer. Having studied Business Management she thought this was a potential field she would like to work in the future, though, at that stage she did not know how the sector operated. The internship provided Nasreen with practical work experience, but also increased her confidence in dealing with new situations.

At the time of my final interview both Nasreen and Ayesha were single, but they did not express any long-term career plans due to expectations of marriage. Gill and Worley (2010) believe racialisation exists in everyday practice with an individual's actions revealing the relationship between structure and agency. Neither Ayesha nor Nasreen questioned their families' intention for them to marry by the age of 25 and the constraint this would place upon their employment opportunities. Nasreen explained:

Nasreen:        "the plan is to marry in a few years. I think I would still work up until we had kids, maybe work part-time, but not full-time I don't think I'd be able to do full-time."

They did however want to work in the short-term so after Ramadan started looking for work. Bagley and Abubaker (2017) found Muslim women often experience prejudice when trying to enter the workplace through hidden discrimination based on their ethnicity. Rootham's (2015) research, also focusing on Muslim women, posited that in western society they are racialised and constructed as an oppressed group due to outward embodiment of their religion and gender through clothing and everyday social practice which leads to disadvantage in the workplace. While it is not possible to say if this was the case for Nasreen and Ayesha, when I interviewed them a year after graduation they had struggled to secure jobs and were working on short-term contracts.

McCluney et al. (2018) research found evidence of structural racism in the workplace where people from ethnic minority groups were more likely to be in precarious work roles which was the case for Ayesha and Nasreen. Due to budget cuts Ayesha had been unable to find work in the youth sector so she was working in a school as a teaching assistant. Her contracts were termly and she was working in her third school.

Nasreen had been unemployed for nine months before securing her short-term contract as a marketing assistant in a local financial services organisation. Nasreen said:

Nasreen: “I did struggle to find a job in the marketing industry. The experience I had (from internship) wasn’t enough. Then I visited careers and they recommended a fixed-term contract as fewer people apply.”

Professional careers advice is important for students who are struggling to secure work (Adegoke, 2014) as their specialist knowledge and support can help them to overcome structural barriers presented by the field to target themselves more effectively in relation to their personal situation.

On her employment experiences Ayesha said:

Ayesha: “I’ve been through a few jobs. I applied to an agency and I started working in schools.”

Working on short-term contracts meant they were uncertain about their future. Nasreen particularly found the prospect of re-engaging with the interview process daunting due to her quiet disposition and the fact it had taken her nine months to secure her present job. Both still planned to marry in two or three years’ time and have a family which they said would change their working situation. Van Laar et al. (2013) discuss that young Muslim women living in the West can face pressure from wider society to forgo their cultural and religious identities and conform to Western norms. While Nasreen and Ayesha were pleased they had attended university and that they were currently in employment, they did not have ambitious long-term career plans to secure as they were following their families’ cultural expectations in terms of prioritising marriage. They did however want to work in the future, probably on a part-time basis, to use the skills and abilities they had gained from their educational achievements.

#### 5.4.3 Summary of Respondents Not Engaging due to Personal Circumstances

Corlett and Mavin (2014) believe intersectionality plays an important role in the development of identity with a combination of background factors appearing to influence the behaviours of the four respondents not engaging with the graduate

labour market due to personal circumstances. The social construction of masculine and feminine identities (Borgerson & Rehn, 2004) leads to gendered roles in society. Upon graduation the female respondents in this group were following a traditional model of prioritising their partners' career over their own (Bradley, 2013). In our interviews they did not question the situation, viewing it as the next stage in their lives. Webb et al. (2002) believe women misrecognise their position in society accepting masculine power relations as normal practice (McNay, 2000). Lyonette (2015) posits that while the discourse on gender in the workplace is often presented as personal choice the reality is that structured working practices continue to impact on women's jobs. While Krais (2006) views the masculine control of resources as a form of symbolic violence which continues to disadvantage women in the home and the workplace. Whether through choice or circumstance these respondents' personal situation did effect their actions after completing their education with all four presenting a gendered habitus that was also influenced by class and ethnicity.

Through acquiring recognised capital from her placement Lydia had the highest level of employability amongst all the respondents in the "Fish out of Water" group. Wishing to marry her partner meant she encountered the objectively structured field of the armed forces which imposed specific rules on her decision-making, particularly in relation to where she would be living. Ayesha also had good employability skills through her volunteering and paid work experience in the youth sector. When she looked for work after graduation budget cuts meant little work was available in her preferred field so she took a side wards move to work as a teaching assistant. Nasreen and Heather had lower holdings of capital in terms of paid work experience. Being conscious of this Nasreen undertook an unpaid internship to help develop her employability skills to better position herself for when she was ready to look for work. While I do not know Heather's employment outcome her initial work plans were modest looking for horizontally segregated jobs typically held by women (Wood, 2008), though, she did plan to volunteer with the homeless to develop her capital holdings to move into the sector at a later date.

Through their behaviours all four exhibited a traditional gendered habitus. Acquired through socialisation, habitus leads to deeply inculcated practice that is hard to change (Arnot, 2002). Habitus influences an individual's practice when they meet socially constructed objective structures (Bourdieu, 1977). By the time I interviewed them they

had already decided their next steps after graduation. While they were pleased with their academic achievements they did not connect their qualifications to career ambitions instead prioritising their family circumstances. In the next section I will discuss the students not engaging with the labour market due to focusing on their degree.

### 5.5 Focusing on their Degree

The final explanation for not engaging with the graduate labour market has been categorised as focusing on their degree with students prioritising their studies during their final year rather than applying for jobs. The two respondents in this category, Sam and James, were both males from working-class backgrounds with differences in ethnicity. As a White British working-class male originating from a deprived area in the North East of England Sam represents the group of people least likely to attend university (Independent Commission on Fees, 2014). When he was younger he described himself as a “wild child” at school, but a good GCSE performance changed his opinion of education on which he commented:

Sam:            “I realised I had a reasonably good mind ... I think it was more of a personal thing really, in the sense that I realised it was my own life, I didn’t want to throw it away, I didn’t want to waste it.”

At college Sam started to focus on his studies achieving good grades to progress on to university. While he could have accessed a higher ranking university he chose his current institution as it was the “friendliest” one that he visited. Sam’s decision reflects Reay et al.’s (2005) findings that working-class students tend to select universities based on their familial habitus preferring an institution that they feel comfortable within rather than considering ranking and status. Sam’s family were pleased that he had continued his education, though, he made the decision independently rather than having direct input from his parents again reflecting his working-class habitus (Davey, 2012).

James on the other hand was from a British Chinese heritage and his parents had been a strong influence on his decision to continue his education to degree-level

(Tomlinson, 1997). Hagelskamp et al. (2010) posit improved education and work opportunities are key reasons for migration and reflecting on his childhood James said:

James: “They always tell me about their childhood and how they didn’t get the opportunity to go to school and their poor lifestyle so they want me to do better. They came to England so when we were born we would have a better upbringing. They want us to work hard, but not physical work, sat in an office.”

James and Sam provided strikingly different reasons for focusing on their studies during their final year rather than engaging with the graduate labour market. James’ reason was related to a poor performance at A-level as he achieved 88 UCAS points from one B and two D’s which he attributed to working long hours in his parents take-away. Throughout our interviews James expressed concerns about his parents work conditions commenting:

James: “from when I was a child to now I help my parents in the takeaway ... the more I help the less strain on them. The problem is because I had to work during sixth-form my A-levels aren’t that great.”

Jackson (2012) found that students from a Chinese background usually perform above average at A-level, but James commented that his parents did not understand the UK education system and therefore, did not appreciate the amount of time needed for study. As a consequence, his focus in his final year at university was on achieving at least a 2.1 in his degree to compensate for his earlier results.

In contrast, Sam had performed exceptionally well achieving one A and two B’s which is equivalent to 128 UCAS points. He was academically focused and hoped to achieve a First Class Honours so that he could continue onto a research masters funded through a scholarship. Explaining his reason for waiting he said:

Sam: “I haven’t applied for jobs yet because I want to find out my results. I don’t think it’s fair to an employer as well if I apply for a job and turn round and just go sorry.”



As Sam would prefer to pursue postgraduate study over employment he wanted to be sure that his results would allow him to continue onto masters rather than secure a job to later withdraw. Having established their reasons for focusing on their studies during the final year I will now separately discuss Sam and James' understanding of the graduate labour market

#### 5.5.1 Understanding the Field as a Site of Opportunity

I have classified Sam in the “Fish out of Water” group due to his plans upon graduation lacking strategic direction. Ideally he would like to take a masters as he enjoyed academic study rather than the course forming part of a long-term career plan to enter a specific field. Since he could not be certain until results day as to whether he would be accepted for masters he had undertaken broad research to identify potential fields he could enter if he had to find a job. Sam was geographically mobile and did not intend to return to his home town in a deprived area of North-East England as there were few job opportunities. Sam was able to articulate his employability through recognising his transferable skills which are valued by employers (Senior & Cubbidge, 2010). He said:

Sam:           “with a history degree you can literally do anything ... a lot of the skills you learn are transferable. I can work independently, I can write well, I can read quickly and efficiently and I can analyse very well. I have been a rep for the history department so I am fairly confident speaking in public.”

During a short placement as part of his degree Sam had worked as a research assistant for a professor which had led to his interest in pursuing further academic studies. Studying for masters was Sam's ideal next step, but if he did not achieve the grades he thought he would apply for marketing roles or work for an organisation such as a trade union or government department as these would all use his research skills. He did not have a detailed understanding of how the fields operate, but from looking at jobs online he commented:

Sam:           “I read through the job description and I was like, I can do that, I have the skills to do that.”

Sam was highly confident in his abilities and felt he was in control of the situation. Entry to the graduate labour market had been deliberately delayed with Sam exhibiting symbolic mastery in his decisions. A number of his behaviours fit with Greenbank and Hepworth's (2008) findings on working-class students such as prioritising work in the final year and not using the careers service. This latter finding is linked to working-class students preferring to speak to tutors who they are already familiar with rather than an independent advisor. He said:

Sam: "I'm an independent person and I'd rather get a job off my own back. I appreciate there's help available."

Other behaviours contradicted their findings as Sam had moved away from home and he had only worked during holidays so as not to effect his studies.

Sam reflected that attending university had provided him with good opportunities for the future. Irwin and Elley (2013) found that middle-class parents normalise higher aspirations in their children's upbringing, a contrast to Sam's experiences as he had never discussed his future with his working-class parents commenting:

Sam: "I've never talked to them about it ... they want me to be happy and get a job that I love, I think, I hope."

Bourdieu and Champagne (1999) observed that academic achievement does not always allow access to improved social positions. Saying that he did "not believe in the class thing" Sam's long-term motivation from pursuing academic success was to achieve job satisfaction as he commented:

Sam: "I'd rather be in a job I like and be paid poorly for it than to be in a job I hate and be well paid for it."

From his self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy Sam presented himself with high employability skills (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). As he had not applied for jobs during his final year, and I did not hear back from him after graduation, I do not know whether he had been able to exert his agency and meet his study or employment aspirations.

### 5.5.2 Experiencing the Field as a Site of Challenge

James intended to work upon graduation so he had undertaken preliminary job research based on the field of accountancy following advice from his father. He explained that Maths and Science are highly regarded subjects in Chinese families and since he was good at Maths at school he said that his:

James:           “Dad suggested that I became an accountant ... told me to do what I can to become an accountant.”

To help him pursue a career in accountancy he had studied Business Management specialising in Finance. His only work experience in the field was from a compulsory two-week work placement at school where his father had used his social capital to secure him a place at the family's accountant. High levels of social capital are essential in competitive fields (Savage et al., 2013), but this was the limit of James' father's influence as he could not secure further experience.

The field of accountancy has high entry barriers with James underperformance at A-level (Alexander et al., 2015) leading to long-term structural disadvantage. Organisations typically ask for 120 points and James commented:

James:           “I miss out on the UCAS points. The big firms all require a lot of UCAS points and grades and I obviously can't get in so I think I'm going to focus on small companies.”

James no longer discussed graduate jobs with his parents as he felt they did not understand the difficulties he was facing trying to enter the field of accountancy. He commented:

James:           “They are still encouraging me to go into accountancy, but he doesn't talk about it much because sometimes he goes overboard. They focus on it being Maths and it annoys me and they can tell it annoys me so they've stopped.”

James also exhibited a level of symbolic mastery understanding his academic achievements to date and that he was in a relatively weak position in relation to the field of accountancy due to his UCAS points and lack of experience. This was the limit

of James understanding as he had not researched wider opportunities within the field and did not plan to do so until after graduation. James exemplifies Bauder's (2005) findings that a problem frequently faced by ethnic minority groups is a limited knowledge of the labour market rules or as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992 p119) refer to it "informational capital". Having knowledge and information is a form of power as individuals are able to use it to negotiate entry and progression in a field. There are many roles in the field of accountancy, but by focusing on graduate schemes with large organisations James was unaware of the wider opportunities that may be more accessible to him. He had not sought careers advice which is common practice amongst working-class students. Greenbank and Hepworth's (2008) findings show that since they are not looking for work at that point in time they do not feel the need to visit careers even though it would provide them with an early, more expert understanding of the field for when they are ready to engage.

When I interviewed James a year after graduation he had returned home to live with his parents. He was pleased that the focus on academic studies in the final year had led to the hoped for 2.1. Reay's (2004) comment that habitus is demonstrated through agency indicated James' weak trajectory in the graduate labour market as he was unemployed. Commenting on his applications he said:

James: "Most of them reject me or occasionally I get an online test and I fail those. Some of the feedback I got was that other people have more experience so that's a problem as well. I'm not picky I would probably just take any opportunity now."

In our final interview he revealed for the first time that he had a social contact in the field of accountancy, his cousin, who worked in the HR department of a leading national company. Capital is only valuable when it is symbolically recognised (Moore, 2012) and while she had offered to help, James had not taken advantage of this continuing to apply independently. James was still focusing on a role working in finance, though, he had broadened his search and he was prepared to move or travel for the right job. James said:

James: "I'm looking throughout the UK, but trying to avoid London. It's not that I don't want to go to London it's just that it's way too expensive."

A further year later I was contacted by James asking me to supply him with a reference as he had managed to secure a temporary one-year contract with a national organisation working in a finance role. The organisation was within travelling distance of home so he planned to continue living with his parents. It was two years since James had graduated, but he was pleased that he was taking his first steps in the field of finance.

### 5.5.3 Summary of Respondents Focusing on their Degree

In line with Greenbank and Hepworth's (2008) findings as working-class students both Sam and James focused on their academic studies during their final year. They arrived at their decision through conscious reflection that formed part of a longer-term plan to open up their opportunities for them. For Sam this involved high achievement to continue studying while James delayed looking for work to improve on a previous weaker academic performance to strengthen his position in the labour market.

As working-class students they potentially faced more barriers on entering the labour market with James' having the additional challenge of being from an ethnic minority background (Okay-Somerville & Scholaris, 2017). I was only able to hold a follow-up interview with James who remained unemployed a year after graduation and took a further year to secure a short-term contract. However, this was a graduate-level job in a finance role and as recommended by McKeowan and Lindorff (2011) he had persisted until he had accessed the labour market.

Working-class students are the least likely to ask for professional support when making major decisions (Reay et al., 2005). James and Sam had both gathered their informational capital from the internet and speaking to friends so their knowledge was fairly broad in relation to the field. Additionally, James misrecognised a source of social capital that he could have used to his advantage, his cousin who worked in the field of accountancy. Bathmaker et al. (2013) found middle-class students are more likely to take advantage of social contacts, and other relevant holdings of capital, to take a stronger position in relation to the field.

James and Sam's decision to postpone engagement with the graduate labour market during their final year acknowledges that success from university should not solely be measured in terms of economic benefits (Collini, 2012). Lawson (2012) argues that

universities should be considered a place of learning with Sam and James valuing their academic achievement in gaining a degree. While they both intended to use their qualifications to access graduate roles they had reflected on their own time-scale for applications planning to apply after graduation. Having considered the circumstances of the three clusters of respondents in the “Fish out of Water” group through the lens of habitus I will now summarise the barriers faced in relation to graduate employment.

#### 5.6 Barriers to Graduate Employment for Respondents Classified as “Fish out of Water”

Barriers represent obstacles that make the transition from the field of education to the field of employment more difficult for some graduates in comparison to others. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) and Wilton (2011) believe that when assessing an individual’s employability consideration should be given to personal barriers to employment as these lead to unequal opportunities upon graduation. The students classified as “Fish out of Water” faced a number of barriers that could impact on their access to the graduate labour market. I want to note that while certain barriers, such as no career plan, may have contributed towards the students’ lack of engagement some of the barriers identified may only be an issue when they decide to start applying for work, for example low UCAS points. I have already discussed the barriers in relation to students’ circumstances earlier in the chapter, however, Table 5.2 summarises these along with the names of the respondents affected by the particular barrier.

Table 5.2 Summary of Barriers to Graduate Employment for Respondents Classified as “Fish out of Water”.

	Barrier to Graduate Employment	Respondents Affected
1.	A lack of career plan	Chloe, Jane, Mark and Brett
2.	Limitations on geographical mobility or constrained by partner’s work location	All except Sam and later James
3.	No involvement in university-based extracurricular activities	All
4.	No paid work experience	Brett, Nasreen, Heather and James
5.	Low-skilled work experience	Mark, Chloe, Jane, Ayesha and Sam
6.	Lack of economic capital	Heather and Sam
7.	Social capital in relation to the graduate labour market	Limited for all respondents though where present did not always mobilise it to their advantage
8.	Quiet disposition/ low-level of confidence in ability to access labour market when ready	All except Sam, Lydia and Ayesha
9.	No practical advice and guidance available from parents	All
10.	Low informational capital due to not engaging with the careers service	All
11.	Low UCAS points	Chloe, Mark, Heather, Nasreen, Ayesha and James
12.	Gendered, cultural and religious expectations from family members	Lydia, Nasreen, Ayesha, Heather and James

Three barriers impacted upon all ten respondents within this group; no sustained involvement in extracurricular activities at university, no practical advice from parents and no professional careers advice which subsequently led to low informational capital in relation to the field. The other major barriers experienced by the majority of the group were a limitations on geographical mobility and little social capital that they could mobilise in relation to the graduate labour market. Bourdieu (1989) believed that while individuals can exert their agency to make their own choices, objective structures can impose restrictions. For example, a minimum UCAS point entry criteria for graduate schemes is a structural barrier that organisations have placed within the recruitment process. Other barriers are more complex, but can also be linked to underlying structural reasons. For example, Heather had been unable to access work experience due to caring for her mother and younger brother. I will now conclude the chapter in the next section.

## 5.7 Chapter Summary

Bourdieu's epistemological stance of structural constructivism (Fowler, 1997) is applicable to the respondents classified as "Fish out of Water" as their practice was influenced by their habitus. At a surface level the group could also be described as Retreatists (Tomlinson, 2007) during their final year, focusing on other goals due to personal preferences rather than a career. However, their reasons for not engaging with the graduate labour market were not necessarily freely made choices, but were due to a complex integration of circumstances. Personal background factors placed limitations upon their "structure of opportunity" (Roberts, 2009). For example, Lydia's future husband being in the military meant the army decided where they would live which may leave her in a location with few merchandising jobs available. In addition to personal factors, the field also has procedures that place barriers to graduate access. For example, Sam and James' focus on their studies was a response to rules in the field they wished to enter. Sam required high grades to obtain a scholarship and James needed to compensate for lower A-level grades. Typically of working-class students, their decision was made independently without support and advice from their parents or university services (Reay et al., 2005).

Heather and Lydia's lack of engagement was due to following a traditional working-class gendered habitus prioritising their partner's work over their own reflecting the



continuation of masculine roles dominating the field of work (Bourdieu, 2000). Nasreen and Ayesha's circumstances involved cultural as well as gendered expectations as they did not express long-term career ambitions due to anticipated marriage and family. While they secured work, a year after graduation both were on short-term contracts which placed them at a structural disadvantage in the labour market as they did not have job security and were forced to search for new work on a periodic basis.

The final four students, Chloe, Jane, Brett and Mark, had attended university with the intention of securing graduate-level work, but did not engage with the labour market due to a lack of career plan. With no careers advice they had struggled since school to identify future job roles and were overwhelmed by the highly structured graduate labour market. There were a number of other underlying factors also influencing their actions. For example, a desire to live close to home was influenced by their parents' wishes. Accompanied by difficulties in forming a graduate identity it led to hysteresis and a mismatch between their actions and those required to enter the graduate labour market.

Individuals can use capital at their disposal to position themselves in relation to the field (Bourdieu, 1984) and while at the point of graduation they had not tried to access graduate employment they had consciously accumulated capital that could potentially help when they were in a position to engage. For example, Nasreen's unpaid internship and Lydia's sandwich placement. As none of the respondents classified as "Fish out of Water" had applied for roles during their final year they did not have any practical experience of the graduate application process. Most were aware that it would be multi-stage that may involve testing, assessment centre activities and interviews. They believed it would be a tough and rigorous process, but they were unsure how it would work in practice.

Employability levels amongst the group varied with Lydia being in the strongest position from her placement. Sam was also well-placed due to his confidence and ability to articulate his skills, though, this had not yet been tested in a job application. When I spoke to seven students twelve-months later none of them were in a permanent graduate-level job, an indication of their difficulties in exerting their agency in the labour market due to limitations placed upon them.

An individual's behaviour is not pre-determined, but actions are frequently bound up with the past through their habitus (Schlosser, 2013). All ten students' engagement with the field of graduate labour was influenced by their background with holdings of capital and barriers impacting on some more than others. Ambitions varied within this group with several such as Mark and Chloe holding high career aspirations while Sam was focusing on job satisfaction and Lydia was prioritising marriage and family. Upon graduation outcomes can vary significantly with an important consideration being whether they match an individual's hopes and aspirations as one graduate may be satisfied with an outcome that leaves another feeling disappointed.

In summary, this group were referred to as "Fish out of Water" as they did not meet recent governments' expectations of searching for graduate-level work when they completed their degree (Department of Education, 2017d). Their lack of engagement was not due to a lack of motivation or desire to work, but was instead influenced by their habitus and personal circumstances. I have discussed the students' subjective experiences revealing the gendered, cultural and classed nature of their actions. The next chapter will now discuss the second group of students who have been referred to as "Between Two Worlds" since they viewed university as a life changing experience. While they had engaged with a range of opportunities available upon graduation, including work and study, they felt that as they finished their degree they were not yet in their desired position within the field.

## **Chapter Six – “Between Two Worlds” searching, but unable to secure graduate-level employment.**

### **6.1 Introduction**

With the continued growth in the university sector successive governments from 1960 onwards have adopted an economic and social development approach to higher education believing that a degree is the route to skilled employment (BIS, 2016). Since the introduction of the Key Information Set of data (BIS, 2011) and the TEF ((Department for Education, 2017b) emphasis has been placed upon using metrics to measure success. One of the main measures is the DLHE data which records the number of students in employment six months after graduation with a further statistic indicating the level of employment. As only tangible outcomes can be measured, Kalfa and Taksa (2015) argue that a performance-based approach has led to managerialism in the sector supporting McArthur’s (2011) position that the life-enriching aspect of education is increasingly being overlooked. Collini (2012) similarly agrees that an economic approach disregards the importance of intellectual development which is crucial for moving forward the boundaries of knowledge. In my study I recognise the wider role of higher education rather than just statistics that focus on graduate employment outcomes.

Within this chapter I present my analysis of the group of respondents classified as “Between Two Worlds”. I have chosen this title to represent the life-changing nature of higher education. While seven members of this group, Darren, Christina, Charlotte, Jessica, Abdul, Dana and Anna, did not feel they had fulfilled their career ambitions at the point of graduation (Porter, 2014) since they were not yet in their hoped for job role, the remaining three were satisfied with their achievements and the route they were following upon finishing their degree. Measuring employment outcomes is a narrow measure of success within the higher education sector. Therefore, within my analysis I will be discussing other aspects of success expressed by the respondents including personal growth, academic achievement and personal satisfaction.

As only one member of this group was from a White British middle-class background the other nine could be considered to be the widening participation students (HESA, 2014) targeted to improve job opportunities, and therefore social mobility, through

higher education (Department for Education, 2017d). This group appear to be achieving the first part of the aim by accessing higher education, however, upon completing their studies the job market presented barriers that constrained their ability to exert their agency.

This chapter will therefore firstly identify the respondents classified as “Between Two Worlds”. Reasons for being classified in this group have been divided into three categories; changing lives, financial necessity and not ready for work yet, and these will be discussed in detail afterwards through the lens of habitus. I will consider their experiences of searching for and accessing work taking into account their understanding of the field and holdings of capital in relation to graduate-level employment. I will finally draw the chapter together with a summary of the barriers faced by the members of this group in relation to the graduate labour market.

## 6.2 Research Participants Classified as “Between Two Worlds”

Ten respondents have been classified as “Between Two Worlds” with the group comprising eight females and two males. Based on these figures there is a disproportionate number of females in the group at 80% as they represent only 65% of the sample. With only two students identifying themselves as middle class this category is also dominated by working-class students who again form 80% of the group in comparison to 58% of the sample. In terms of ethnicity the number of White British are proportionate to the sample as eight of the group are from this background. The remaining two students identified themselves as being from a British Bangladeshi heritage and a White European heritage as the student’s parents were from Eastern Europe.

The background of each respondent is noted in Table 6.1 along with brief reasons as to why they were classified as “Between Two Worlds”. Following the table the reasons for classification will be discussed in more detail.

Table 6.1 Research Participants Classified as “Between Two Worlds”

Interview Number	Name	Reasons for being in the category
1	<b>Darren</b> Male Working class White British	<b>Changing Lives</b> Attended university to improve his life and employment opportunities. Working in two part-time, non-graduate roles. Lived at home and finding it difficult to break family ties.
7	<b>Charlotte</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Financial Necessity</b> Applied for a high number of graduate jobs, but rejected by all, mainly at the early stages. Returned home due to lack of money as working in a non-graduate role with unsociable hours.
9	<b>Abdul</b> Male Working class British Bangladeshi	<b>Not ready for work yet</b> Initially continued in part-time job from university. Started a second part-time job despite being offered full-time hours as he is uncertain of where he sees his future so keeping his options open.
11	<b>Jessica</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Not ready for work yet</b> Increased hours at part-time job to full-time. Had applied for the management scheme, but was turned down due to a lack of experience so trying to acquire more skills to reapply.
22	<b>Louise</b> Female Middle class White British	<b>Not ready for work yet</b> Does not feel ready to commit to a permanent contract as she would like to travel first. Taken short-term contracts to fund her trip as one year after graduation she emigrated on a two-year working visa.
24	<b>Adele</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Changing Lives</b> Mature student. Only 2 GCSE's from school. Cared for disabled son for 20 years. Returned to education to achieve qualifications for herself and would like to secure a fulfilling job.
26	<b>Dana</b> Female Middle class White European	<b>Not ready for work yet</b> Studied for a vocational degree, but finding it difficult to gain professional practice experience as high barriers to enter the field. Considering changing career path, but would require additional qualifications.
28	<b>Anna</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Not ready for work yet</b> Progressed straight through education. Extremely shy and little work experience. Secures non-graduate role to develop her skills for future job applications.
30	<b>Christina</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Financial Necessity</b> Care leaver so has to be self-supporting upon graduation. Advised to study a vocational course for work opportunities, but questioning whether she wants to enter the field so applying to other roles

31	<b>Sally</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Changing Lives</b> Mature student. Did not want to continue education after school. Retail manager before being made redundant. Returned to education to provide better future for her daughter as she is a single parent.
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### 6.3 Changing Lives

I have classified Darren, Adele and Sally in the Changing Lives group as they had attended university to pursue knowledge to ultimately improve their opportunities in life. Their main motivation was to secure satisfying and rewarding work with pay being a secondary consideration. While they were all awarded their degree, and had taken positive action towards employment, I have placed them in the “Between Two Worlds” category as they were not in a graduate-level job within twelve-months of finishing their degree when the final interviews took place. All three were from a White British working-class background with Sally and Adele being female and Darren male. All three had lived at home while at university due to caring responsibilities, with Sally and Adele being mothers of school-age children while Darren looked after his mother who had long-term health problems.

Sally and Adele were mature students. Neither had been interested in education when they were younger so they had left school after GCSE’s to enter into employment. Adele’s dream was to be a hairdresser which at the time did not require any qualifications to start training, and Sally had left school as she wanted to earn money. Laughing Sally commented:

Sally: “I wanted my own house and I thought I knew everything.”

Sally had spent nine years working in retail before being made redundant shortly before the birth of her daughter. As a single parent she did not feel able to return to the sector as working long, unsociable hours made it difficult to arrange childcare. Sally explained:

Sally: “I was working six days a week as the company didn’t have a good set out so as a manger it would fall on my shoulders if ought went wrong. I want to spend time with (daughter) so weekends off would be great.”

Adele on the other hand was married with three children. After school she had trained to be a hairdresser, but had similarly felt forced to leave work owing to being the primary carer for her disabled son. Adele commented:

Adele: “My eldest son was born with cerebral palsy. After he was diagnosed I had to keep going to hospitals to sort everything out. Obviously I had to shut my hairdressing business down as I couldn’t work for myself and have so much full-time doing with (son’s name). I just thought (sighs) ... I never bothered about myself and just carried on.”

Their experience resonates with Skeggs (1997) findings that White working-class women prioritise home and family and forgo opportunities to develop a career.

Mills (2008) argues that the education system reproduces inequality in society as working-class children are unable to access the same opportunities as the middle class. Working-class parents are also more likely to accept situations that perpetuate inequality (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992). Adele particularly wished that hers had questioned teachers about the lack of support she received at school saying:

Adele: “I was in a lot of the bottom sets and I struggled to keep up. I thought there’s no point asking and I’ll just scrape through. Now I wish I’d spoken to my mum and dad and asked them to step in.”

Finding school difficult had left her with low holdings of educational capital (Vaara & Fay, 2011) as she passed just two GCSE’s. Sally and Adele were both optimistic that their return to education would change their futures.

Heagney and Benson (2017) found that support from family and friends is crucial for mature students, both before and during study, as they often lack confidence. Sally was actively encouraged to return to education by her grandmother who believed she could achieve more with her life. Sally commented:

Sally: “My nan kept saying you’re wasted in retail and I thought I want to do better for my daughter as well. I want her to see that education is a good thing. How can I have a go at her about school when I left at 16? I’ve had to come back to it to better myself.”

For Adele a friend played a key role by registering her for a taster day at a local college as she believed it would be good for her to have a new opportunity for herself rather than focusing on her children all the time. Adele and Sally had to study an Access course first to meet the university entry criteria. Reflecting upon her return to education Adele said:

Adele:            “It’s been such a big transition. It’s not just you’ve come out of school, you’ve had a family and then decided to go back in to education. You’ve trained to a totally different career, so it’s a total flip.”

As a White British working-class male Darren belonged to the group in society least likely to attend university (Crawford & Greaves, 2015), but he had continued straight through from college as he wanted to broaden his horizons. He lived in an area that he described as boring and where everyone knew each other. He did however, have a strong attachment to the neighbourhood and was close to members of his extended family living there. When discussing his home town he said:

Darren:           “it’s kind of old fashioned that people are born there and they live there all their life and they have a job and then they go out at a weekend and that’s all they do and that’s not what I want.”

Darren was keen to break-away from the typical jobs held by people in the area where he grew up and viewed university as the first stage in that process. He said:

Darren:           “Like my friends, I’ve seen them kind of stuck in dead end jobs and not going anywhere. I just feel there is more out there ... I think having gone through it (university), it will shape my family life in future, family life will be a lot better.”

Sally similarly wanted to make a change in her life and commented:

Sally:            “I want to do better for my daughter as well. I want her to see that education is a good thing.”

Moreau and Leathwood (2006) posit that to progress into higher-level roles after university, working-class students may have to question their attitudes and beliefs.



However, changing habitus can be difficult as it potentially dislocates an individual from their origins (Lehmann, 2014). For example, Friedman's (2016) research found that his upwardly mobile working-class interviewees felt estranged from their families as they did not understand the demands of their high flying careers. Additionally, some were uncomfortable with their expensive material possessions in comparison to their childhood homes.

Sally believed she would always maintain her working-class values as she had worked hard for everything she owned. In contrast, Adele and Darren envisioned themselves as middle class in the future. For Adele this was due to associating class with qualifications, believing that holding a degree would automatically change her social position. Darren however, was more conscious of his actions and his capabilities in the future (Noble & Watkins, 2003). Reflecting on his social class he said:

Darren: "I live on a council estate and my family are not career oriented where as I am. When I leave university I want to leave that notion of work and going to the pub at the weekend behind. I think that's more of a middle-class mentality than a lower class. I think this thing about progression is inside me and it's going to drive me on further. That's why I say I've got a middle-class mentality."

Darren associated a "middle-class mentality" with education and a focus on long-term career opportunities rather than a "living for today" attitude that he believed was held by his working-class friends. He also thought that the middle-class had wider horizons and were aware of life beyond their own community. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) posit that the education system favours middle-class children as they possess cultural and academic capital that is not only recognised by teachers, but later provides advantage in the labour market. In comparison to the working-class with limited economic and cultural capital, middle-class parents are more likely to invest time and money on educational visits and extracurricular activities to enhance their children's non-merit characteristics that are sought by employers. Due to his family's financial circumstances Darren felt that opportunities during his childhood had been limited, but once he finished his degree he hoped to actively seek new experiences to broaden his outlook on life.

To achieve their life changes all three had actively engaged with the field of employment during their final year at university. Adele and Sally viewed the job market as a field of opportunity carefully considering different roles and how they matched their expectations. Adele had studied a vocational-based degree in Health and Community Studies while Sally had taken Sociology as she had enjoyed studying the subject on her Access to Education course. Adele commented on her degree choice:

Adele:            “I chose health and social care because of all the experience of looking after (son). I thought I could do that and I could make a difference.”

Ali (2016 p1) describes mature students as more “critical consumers of education” prepared to access support available. Adele and Sally visited careers on a number of occasions to initially help them identify sectors relevant to their degree contradicting Pasero’s (2016) research that first generation university students are less likely to use the university careers service as they do not appreciate the range of advice available.

Sally identified social work as a specific field she would like to enter, explaining that it is a recognised career path after studying Sociology. Sally explained that to enter the field she first required a masters degree and relevant voluntary experience. Dean (2016) found that due to their habitus the majority of young volunteers are middle class as there is usually a better fit between personal and organisational values. Sally however, had volunteered with a children’s support charity as part of her degree. As a mature student she felt she was making a valuable contribution to the service, as well as acquiring relevant cultural capital, so she continued to volunteer after completing the module. Her plan upon graduation was to take a year out from studying to acquire further experience then study for a masters in order to strategically position herself to apply for roles within the field. Sally commented:

Sally:            “People don’t just want a degree anymore. A degree’s alright on paper, but if there’s no experience there’s nothing behind it ... they have placements alongside your masters as well which is good.”

The DLHE survey (BIS, 2011) considers studying for a masters to be a graduate-level outcome which could have placed Sally in my final data analysis chapter. I have placed her in “Between Two Worlds”, though, as she had identified social work as a field she would like to enter towards the end of her degree rather than it being a long-term

strategic aim. At the point of graduation Sally had not yet applied for a masters course considering postgraduate study as a means to an end to enter the field of social work rather than pursuing knowledge for its own sake. While we discussed a career in social work, Sally did not express it as a definite plan. I felt that as she was not yet fully committed to social work she could potentially change her mind if a suitable alternative opportunity arose during the gap year from studying. Webber's (2015) research, indicating that it can take longer for mature students to adjust to life after studying, supports Sally's actions as she wanted to consider her opportunities before committing to her long-term career.

After her careers visit, Adele decided to look for jobs in the care sector which are usually advertised as single positions that look for an immediate start. She started applying as she approached the end of her degree and visited careers to check her application forms and CV. Reflecting on her support Adele said:

Adele: "Careers were helpful. They said we should use this on your CV and this on your personal statement. So that's good because I'm not trying to do it on my own. I think if I was trying to do it on my own I could be putting in applications and probably getting knocked back. Now that I've prepared my CV and personal statement I can re-word it for different roles."

Bourdieu (1984) refers to working-class women as being doubly dominated due to their gender and social position restricting their opportunities. For example, Adele and Sally were geographically limited to jobs within travelling distance of their current home to fit with their family caring responsibilities. Adele was slightly more flexible as her children were older, but Sally was further restricted to school hours. McLeod (2005) links habitus to gender socialisation where cultural influences lead to the development of a masculine or feminine identity. Sally and Adele indicated their gendered identity by presenting themselves as mothers first, embodying a gendered habitus in their actions and speech (Skeggs, 1997). Further supporting their gendered habitus they wanted to work fewer hours to be with their children, acknowledging that this placed a constraint upon their career opportunities. On her return to study Adele commented that she felt:

Adele: “I shouldn’t be so selfish. I felt like I shouldn’t be doing something for me. I should be pushing everybody else, but not for me.”

Compromising their employment, by focusing on family, conforms to a female gender stereotype that is viewed by many as naturalised practice as women are expected to prioritise children over work (McNay, 2000). They were further embodying their gender by entering the horizontally segregated fields of social work and care where women are over-represented (ONS, 2017a). Sally and Adele prioritised job satisfaction over pay and were altruistic in their approach to work wanting careers where they felt they were making a contribution to society. This is in line with Eccles’ (2011) findings that women are more likely to choose work that they feel is valued and worthwhile in society. Regarding her attitude to work Adele said:

Adele: “I’ve said I want a job that I enjoy. I don’t want a job that is a load of money and I come home and I actually hate every single minute of it.”

The International Labour Office (2011) believe that one of the benefits of taking a degree should be an enriched working experience that includes job satisfaction. Adele was not the only respondent in my study who was prioritising this factor in her search for work. Job satisfaction was also particularly noted by Sam in the “Fish out of Water” group and the three creative arts students, Emily, Philip and Warren, in my next chapter titled “The Game Players” indicating the wide-ranging nature of this personal hope from graduate employment.

Turning to Darren, he also exhibited a gendered habitus, but from a masculine perspective expecting to be a provider rather than a carer for his future family (Burnett et al., 2013). He hoped that through higher-level employment he would be able to offer them more opportunities in life than he had experienced himself explaining:

Darren: “Having gone through uni will shape my family life in future, family life will be a lot better. Everything that I’ve learnt about how important education is I can pass onto future generations. I think my belief and ambition to come to uni has come from within myself. There’s not one person close to me that I’ve looked at and thought I want to be like that, I want a better life for my family. It’s come from my own self-motivation.”

Martinez-Roca et al. (2015) believe students from a background such as Darren’s require additional support to successfully negotiate their transition from education to employment as they are unable to draw upon informational capital from their family. However, Darren followed Greenbank and Hepworth’s (2008) expectations of working-class students not visiting careers instead preferring to independently search for advice. He commented:

Darren: “There’s some online forums and sometimes I try and look to see if anybody says anything about the company so I am aware of the online testing and stuff. I don’t seem to get an expert’s opinion though ... I know I should go to careers, but I haven’t got round to it.”

Upon entering the final year Darren had immediately started applying for graduate schemes, but had not been able to pass the psychometric testing stage. He felt a weak CV was acting as a barrier. Darren did have work experience from a part-time job in a local newsagents, but he found it difficult to relate the skills he had developed to graduate jobs (Gbadamosi et al., 2015). He also had no involvement in extracurricular activities, at home or university, after injury forced him to stop playing football for a local team. Finally, he felt that holding 96 UCAS points was a barrier as it precluded him from applying for certain schemes as he did not meet the minimum qualifications criteria.

Darren found completing job applications a time consuming process spending between 45 minutes to two hours tailoring each one to the specific job and organisation. In the middle of term two he decided that due to the number of assessment deadlines he temporarily could not afford to spend the time applying for

jobs when he was not progressing past the first stages. He therefore stopped applying for two months, but planned to restart as soon as his exams had finished.

### 6.3.1 A Continuing Journey to Employment

Twelve months after graduation I did not hear back from Sally, but I did interview Adele and Darren again. They had attended university with the aim of changing their lives and felt that after a difficult year they were now making progress towards a better future. Adele described her employment journey as “wiggly” as she had held three jobs since graduating. Initially she had two different roles caring for adults with learning disabilities, but it involved more physical care work than she wanted. Having taken a gap in employment to care for her family and not being an economic contributor to the household, Adele had not felt under pressure to accept any job. Returning to education had fulfilled a personal ambition to gain a degree and to provide access to enjoyable and satisfying work. Following a suggestion from a friend she had started to work as a special needs teaching assistant and felt she had now found her “niche”. She commented:

Adele: “I can contribute and I can put myself beyond my level. I can have an intellectual conversation and feel like I’m being listened to. Not this you’re just a worker.”

While the role did not require a degree Adele was happy with the situation as the work was challenging, yet rewarding, leaving her the evenings, weekends and holidays free to spend with her family. Adele commented that her family saw her as a “changed person” with a new found confidence in herself. She commented:

Adele: “I sort of came out of myself and thought yeah I can do it. I felt I was being a bit selfish, but if not I’m not going to get anywhere.”

In our final interview Darren also explained his ongoing journey to graduate-employment. After finishing his degree he had continued to apply for graduate-level jobs on a regular basis, but as yet he had not secured a role. He had progressed further, though, by reaching the interview stage with several organisations. Rather than the highly competitive graduate schemes (Targetjobs, n.d.a) he had decided to

focus on smaller organisations with single positions on offer. Since graduating Darren had continued to work in his part-time job at the newsagents. To widen his experience, and increase his cultural capital, he had started a second part-time job working in a supervisory position at a warehouse.

Reay (2004 p434) states that habitus is “a complex interplay of past and present”. Believing university had shaped his future goals to be a manager and buy his own house, Darren also subjectively constrained his opportunities as he was more strongly attached to his family and home than he had anticipated. In the first interview he indicated that he was prepared to move for work; however, twelve months after graduation he was still living at home saying that he had not yet had the “courage” to move away. He had bought a car to widen the distance he could travel for work, but he geographically restricted his job search (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005) to a one-hour commute. Changing habitus can be a slow process (Friedman, 2016) and Darren had started to take small incremental steps towards his aspired middle-class identity. He no longer socialised on a weekly basis with his working-class friends instead preferring to visit new places in his car. He had however, decided to continue living at home, though, he did intend to move away from the area in the future as he believed a graduate job would continue to raise his aspirations for a better life.

Physically working long hours had also impacted upon Darren’s time to search and apply for work, though, he remained confident in his ability to secure a graduate job. He believed it was a matter of time and persistence in continuing to apply. Darren indicated his resilient attitude by saying:

Darren: “I’m a confident and quite positive person and it’s a matter of time. You’ve got to keep on going I guess. I don’t look back and think I should have been more proactive looking for work experience at uni. I do reflect, but obviously there’s nothing I can do about that now. I’ve just got to try to stay positive and keep on applying.”

Shortly after our last interview Darren contacted me to say he had secured a graduate-level role as a marketing assistant. By reflecting upon his applications and interviews each time he was rejected, Darren had eventually developed his practical mastery in

the application process. Through this level of consciousness Darren also exhibited symbolic mastery (Burke, 2016) as he continued to believe in his abilities throughout the eighteen months from his first application to securing a graduate job. While he had modified his expectations as time progressed he had fulfilled his original aim of attending university by securing a graduate job.

### 6.3.2 Summary of Respondents Attending University to Change their Lives

Jenkins (1992) criticises the concept of habitus as being deterministic where divisions in society are reproduced through objective social structures. In contrast, McNay (2000) considers habitus to be a generative process drawing on Bourdieu's (1990a) point that behaviour is never entirely predictable as agents have the potential to change their lives through new experiences. Nash (1999) posits, though, that individuals tend to have a limited range of options as structures place restrictions upon their choice. In summarising Sally, Adele and Darren's experiences I would like to consider their outcomes in comparison to their position when they started university. While they had not secured a graduate job within six months of finishing their studies they were satisfied with their outcomes and felt they had made significant personal achievements.

All three originated from a working-class background, and additionally for Adele and Sally their class intersected with their gender, which meant they faced structural barriers that influenced their employment decisions upon graduation. A key barrier was that they wished to find work close to their current homes which limited the number, and types, of jobs available.

Due to family circumstances Adele and Sally had previously decided to be "stay-at-home" mothers and they continued to prioritise their children over themselves when looking for work (Skeggs, 1997). At the start of their educational journey they held minimal qualifications and Adele particularly exhibited low-levels of confidence in her academic ability. Supporting Webber's (2015) research on mature students their self-esteem had increased while at university. Sally's plans, requiring study at masters-level, were a further indication of her academic self-belief. Webber further posits that mature students reconstruct their identity upon attaining a degree, though, it can take



time to adjust to their new graduate status. Interviewing Adele a year after graduation she was able to reflect back upon her changing identity commenting:

Adele: “When you graduate you are full of all these ideas, you’re excited, you’ve got your degree certificate and then it suddenly goes urgh (implying a let down). It’s taken me a few jobs to find my niche, but I think being a teaching assistant will give me a career.”

Holding a degree provided Adele with a sense of value in her abilities. Additionally, as she had not contributed to the family’s economic capital for a number of years she did not feel financially forced to accept work that did not meet her expectations. Quickly leaving two care-related jobs she changed fields to become a special needs teaching assistant. While it was not necessary for her to hold a degree for this role, without attending university Adele would not have had the skills or confidence to apply for the job. Long-term Adele felt being a teaching assistant offered her opportunities for a rewarding and challenging career. It must be noted that she was not necessarily searching for graduate-level work and, by attending university, her life had been transformed indicating the wider societal value of higher education (Collini, 2012). Having been at home for twenty years caring for a family, Adele exhibited agency by firstly returning to education to achieve a degree before joining the workforce in a role that she found satisfying which is why I have classified her in the Changing Lives group.

I placed Darren in the “Between Two Worlds” chapter as he had not secured a graduate-level job at the time of our final interview. Curnock Cook (cited in Yorke, 2017) believes graduates are pressured to secure work quickly, but it should be viewed as acceptable to take time over major life-changing decisions such as first entry to the labour market. Tomlinson (2007) refers to Careerists as students who are focused on employment and organise their entry into the labour market over a period of time. In comparison, Ritualists see employment as a means to an end. Darren however, appears to fall between these two categories. While he was keen to secure rewarding work his approach to applying for work was not particularly structured and organised and he found it difficult to negotiate his transition into the labour market.

Darren envisaged a different future for himself in comparison to friends living in the neighbourhood he had been brought up in. In our first interview Darren said he was prepared to move away for work. Supported by Garner's (2011) research that people from White working-class estates have a strong sense of community identity, Darren had found it difficult to break away as his grandad, who lived nearby, had recently been ill and he wanted to spend more time with him. Darren had however begun to change his behaviours to those he considered to be middle-class. For example, Darren thought that his working-class friends' routine of working in a low-skilled job during the week and going out socialising at a weekend offered little opportunity for the future so he had stopped this activity. He believed that the middle-class broadened their horizons through new experiences so instead at a weekend he had started to visit new places. Throughout our interviews Darren demonstrated a positive attitude in the face of rejection, persisting in his job search until he eventually secured graduate-level work (McKeowan & Lindorff, 2011). As a working-class student he had typically not taken advantage of professional advice (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). Indicating his efforts to break away from his working-class habitus, Darren reflected on his situation and consciously increased his cultural capital, behaviour which is usually associated with middle-class students (Bathmaker et al., 2013).

Overviewing this group I would conclude that their habitus had not determined their outcomes upon graduation, though, following a structural constructivist epistemology it had influenced them (Fowler, 1997). All three had used their education as a positive experience to change their lives from their original starting point (Bourdieu, 1990b). While they had not met the DLHE target (BIS, 2011), Adele and Darren did not accept their initial position and actively engaged with the labour market until they secured work that met their expectations. Sally had also identified a field which offered future career opportunities that she was satisfied with. They possessed self-confidence and self-esteem, indicators of employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007), and felt that their qualifications had changed their lives to open up long-term career opportunities. I will now consider Christina and Charlotte's experiences as they looked for work through financial necessity.

#### 6.4 Financial Necessity

I have placed two students in this group; Charlotte and Christina, as they had no family economic capital to draw upon to support their transition from study to work. Identifying themselves as White British working-class females, Christina had been brought up in care living with foster parents since junior school. Charlotte, on the other hand, was from a low-income family living in an area that she described as deprived.

Brown et al.'s (2014) research, indicating that students from disadvantaged backgrounds receive 'rough justice' from the education system, seems particularly applicable to these two respondents as they had experienced difficulties in their past that had effected their decisions. For example, Christina's dream had been to study art at university as she had achieved A\* at A-level. Instead she had been advised by her foster family and support workers to train as a mental health nurse to improve her employment opportunities. She commented:

Christina: "the influence was what are you most likely to come out with a job in? I got a lot of this typical parent stuff oh you don't want to do them arts subjects. You are going to end up working in a supermarket for the rest of your life. So I ended up deciding against the arts and going into mental health because it was a vocation and a profession."

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) believe that the education system legitimises inequality with working-class pupils experiencing symbolic violence as they are unable to access the same opportunities as the middle class. This is reinforced by Goodman and Gregg's (2010) point that educational inequality based on class is persistent in the UK with working-class children holding lower expectations. For example, Charlotte had attended a school that she described as "rough" saying:

Charlotte: "to be fair it wasn't the best school, but I did my best".

In her final year at school Charlotte's parents' house was repossessed and the family moved to a council estate two bus rides from school. She was no longer able to participate in extracurricular activities as there was no public transport available for her to return home after standard school hours. Charlotte believed that this difficult

period of time influenced her decision to continue in education, eventually studying Business Management at university. She explained:

Charlotte: “Everything changed after that. I think that’s what changed me to be fair. It made me think about having a better future. Otherwise I would be like my friends and happily have gone into a normal job and probably wouldn’t be here now”.

Due to her family’s economic difficulties when growing-up Charlotte’s main motivation for work was to earn money. Rather than acquiring capital goods she wanted security commenting:

Charlotte: “I just want to be financially stable so that I can give my kids a good life, that’s my sole motivation.”

Habitus can change through new experiences (Reay, 2004) and Charlotte viewed university positively, seeing it as an opportunity to improve her life chances. Moving away to university she hoped to break from the trajectory typically followed by young people in her area saying:

Charlotte: “I wanted to go to uni ‘cause I saw that all my friends were having kids and they were only working in factories and warehouses ... I was like no, its not for me.”

While at university Charlotte regularly visited home, remaining close to her family. She did however feel a change in her habitus when she attended a school reunion commenting that she was:

Charlotte: “detached almost from everyone. I used to feel part of the group, but now I don’t. I feel like an outsider looking in.”

Plummer (2000) found that upon entering a middle-class environment working-class students have to psychologically break from their upbringing to fit in. Charlotte’s comments indicate that she had potentially started to feel different while at university.

Similarly, Christina had also moved to live on campus, saying:

Christina: “I wanted to move into the student houses, but I still wanted to be within travelling distance (of her foster parents) if I needed to get back”.

In contrast to Charlotte, Christina did not visit regularly commenting that once she had made the break “she didn’t actually go back that often.” Christina was also conscious of a changing habitus through education saying:

Christina: “The life I’m leading, or going to be leading, is a lot different to what my family and foster family have experienced.”

Holmes (2015) posits that on entering the workplace students have to reconstruct their identity to present themselves as graduates. Christina recognised that completing her degree represented a time of change and she would be leaving her familiar student life behind. At the time of our interview Christina still had to secure work so she felt uncertain about her future.

#### 6.4.1 Acquiring Capital

Holdings of capital affect an individual’s position in society (Bourdieu, 1984). As already noted, Christina and Charlotte did not have access to family economic capital so securing work quickly was important. Attending university offers cultural capital enhancing opportunities, though, Stuart et al. (2011) found middle-class students are more likely to take advantage of these. Charlotte however, contradicted their research by joining the Ski Society making her the only working-class member of the “Between Two Worlds” group to voluntarily participate in university-based activities. Charlotte’s mother had worked at a snow centre, and as Charlotte helped out she was allowed to ski for free. Becoming a good skier, she joined a regional squad and competed in national junior championships. Due to the cost Charlotte was unable to afford her membership at university after the first year, selling her skis to raise funds to support herself. After this she tended to stay in her accommodation at night socialising with friends.

Charlotte also held capital from work experience. Typically of students, this was from working in shops and a nightclub. As posited by Clark et al. (2015) she struggled to articulate her skills saying:

Charlotte: “I’m not very good at talking about myself. My confidence isn’t there.”

In contrast, Christina had more extensive work experience as her vocational degree in mental health nursing had included four work-based professional placements. Ewertson et al. (2017) posit that placements are crucial in nursing to allow students to develop their skills in a clinical setting. Christina also had additional experience in the care sector from working part-time in residential homes to fund herself through university. Due to the demands of the course, and working part-time, Christina had not joined in extracurricular activities at university.

Social capital acquired through networks and contacts is also advantageous when entering a field (Crossley, 2012). Roberts (2009) would argue that Christina and Charlotte were structurally trapped by their family backgrounds as they had little support available. Christina had access to a care leaver support worker up to the age of 25, but without family she felt isolated in negotiating her transition into the workplace. She had gathered her informational capital regarding employment from a general talk at university with additional advice from peers who were ahead of her in the process reinforcing Reay et al.’s (2005) findings that working-class students are more likely to rely on informal “hot” information than seek professional advice.

Charlotte similarly felt isolated commenting:

Charlotte: “I don’t have any support networks ... my Dad is dyslexic so I have to help him with letters and that formal stuff. My mum’s not very academic either. I’m the first one so they obviously don’t know how.”

Capital is only valuable when it is symbolically recognised by others (Moore, 2012). While Christina and Charlotte had holdings of cultural and social capital I will now discuss their experiences of mobilising it in the graduate labour market.

#### 6.4.2 Engaging with the Graduate Labour Market

On entering their final year Christina and Charlotte were driven to engage with the graduate labour market due to their financial situation. After attending the university’s graduate jobs fair, Charlotte started applying exclusively for graduate schemes making fifteen applications in the first two months. She was attracted to the schemes as they

tend to be in large organisations which she felt offered more financial stability. In relation to graduate schemes Charlotte faced two barriers. Firstly, with 104 UCAS points she did not meet the qualification entry criteria for a number of organisations and secondly, she had been unable to progress further than the psychometric testing stage describing them as a “struggle”. Like many first generation students Charlotte initially did not visit careers (Pasero, 2016) and she appeared to lack of sense of entitlement to support saying:

Charlotte: “I’ve never gone out of my way to ask for careers advice. I’m just a bit nervous to do it ... ‘cause I didn’t get much help at school I’ve always thought I’ll do it myself”

After a talk in class Charlotte did speak to an advisor regarding psychometric testing. However, she continued to be rejected at this stage in the recruitment process saying:

Charlotte: “that’s starting to stress me out really bad because I’ve applied to a lot ... I got to the psychometric test for all of them and I practiced and practiced and practiced. I thought I’m not going to do any better, I’ll do it, I’ll try my best and I didn’t get through. It’s just disheartening.”

An individual’s relationship between their habitus and field provides an understanding of their practice (Maton, 2012). In Charlotte’s case her practice, and therefore habitus, was not homologous to the field (Clark & Zukas, 2013) as her continued rejection throughout the final year indicates she did not meet the expectations of graduate recruiters. Charlotte was unwilling to return to careers as she thought their previous advice on psychometric testing had not helped her to progress through the recruitment process. Charlotte commented:

Charlotte: “I’ve realised how hard it is. I thought I would just walk in, but obviously it’s not like that ... you feel like giving up, but you can’t.”

Having studied a vocational degree in mental health nursing Christina had developed work-based capital to enter a specific field. After a talk from tutors Christina was aware of the overall recruitment process explaining that jobs in the sector usually require immediate starts so applications are made towards the end of the academic year. Christina’s dilemma was that she was unsure whether she wanted to be a mental

health nurse any longer describing the work as “draining” and “demanding”. She believed that her nursing skills were transferable so she had also been applying for graduate schemes, but without success. Christina thought that for non-nursing jobs, recruiters were suspicious as to why she was changing field possibly considering her skills to be subject specific (Wikle & Fagin, 2015) when in fact she believed they could be transferred to a range of general job roles. Christina said:

Christina: “I’ve gained so many transferable skills, but I feel like it’s as if they look at my course and go oh why’s she applying? She’s not appropriate why she’s applied?”

Similar to a number of working-class students in my study Christina had not attended careers as she did not appreciate the range of services available (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). When I last spoke to Christina two months before graduating, although she was planning to apply for mental health nursing jobs, she was uncertain about her future commenting:

Christina: “Maybe I’ll end up as an art therapist, maybe I’ll open my own art store, maybe I’ll go travelling and never come back. I might work in a low paid job for the rest of my life, but be quite content. There’s loads of different things, but they are all maybes.”

During our discussions neither Charlotte nor Christina were reflective upon their situation and therefore did not exhibit symbolic mastery. This was impacting upon their employability as reflection is a key stage of the process (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Understanding personal skills and abilities allows students to position themselves to potential employers and increase their chances of employment.

#### 6.4.3 A Sense of Disappointment

When interviewing Charlotte a year after graduation I learnt that financial necessity meant she had accepted a low-skilled, non-graduate role in a supermarket chain. She found the work physically demanding with a shift pattern of unsociable hours. Charlotte had successfully passed her initial training. However, she lacked confidence to put



herself forward for promotion commenting that most of the managers were male, reinforcing patterns of vertical segregation in the workplace (Wood, 2008).

Charlotte had little sense of achievement from her studies and felt despondent commenting:

Charlotte: “I feel that if I’d got on a graduate job scheme after uni I would have felt like I’d achieved something I’d actually wanted to do. But at the same time I think I could not have a job at all ... my picture of me when I left university to be working in a city and walking with a cup of coffee, but it’s not happened.”

Charlotte was keen to improve her situation so when the graduate schemes re-opened she had applied again. She made no modifications to her practice so faced the same barrier of not being able to progress past the psychometric testing stage. As recommended by Blythe (2015), graduate roles in small to medium-sized organisations may have been more suitable for Charlotte as with shorter recruitment processes they are less likely to use online tests. Charlotte did not know where these roles were advertised so was unable to apply.

In addition to her job role not meeting her expectations Charlotte had moved back to her parents, living again in the area that she had originally attended university to break away from. While she earned enough money for rental accommodation she had no one who met the criteria to act as her guarantor. Moving back home she had contacted school friends explaining:

Charlotte: “I’m closer to people I used to be close to in the past. One of my friends has had a baby as well so I go round and see her a bit.”

To outsiders Charlotte could appear to be slipping back into her former life, spending increasing amounts of time with friends who she previously described as having low aspirations in life. Charlotte still felt in a more positive position than her friends commenting:

Charlotte: “I know I’m doing well now, but I used to think I wasn’t. I’ve got a job with responsibilities and enough money to do stuff.”

In our final interview Charlotte appeared to be struggling to exert her agency in the social structures that surrounded her (Sibeon, 2004). Bourdieu (1984) believed that raising individual hopes that education leads to improved employment opportunities is a form of symbolic violence. Charlotte had been positive about attending university, but limited cultural, social and economic capital meant she was working in a role that she could have accessed five years earlier with GCSE's.

I did not hear back from Christina twelve-months after graduation. She had said that if she did not secure a graduate job then reluctantly she would have to find immediate work in the care sector regardless of the level. Christina's main sense of disappointment was that she had not followed her own ambitions when choosing her degree subject leaving her undecided on her long-term career. This decision had been influenced by her foster family and support workers who felt that due to her working-class background she could not afford to study art as it was less likely to lead to employment upon graduation. Her actions contrast with Louise in the next section, and Emily in the final chapter, who were both encouraged by their middle-class families to pursue artistic degrees for its own sake rather than making a direct link to future employment.

#### 6.4.4 Summary of Respondents Searching for Work through Financial Necessity

Furlong (2013a) posits that although a disadvantaged background is not deterministic it does affect young people's entry into the workplace. He notes that while young people enjoy similar past times, such as listening to music and spending time with friends, those from the middle-class are more likely to participate in organised, capital acquiring activities such as sport and youth groups which are positively viewed during the transition from education to employment. Furlong further believes that working-class young people's agency is constrained from this lack of opportunity in their childhood. In comparison to other respondents in my study Charlotte and Christina's backgrounds were among the most difficult with their personal circumstances influencing their decisions. While pleased that they had completed a degree it was accompanied by a sense of disappointment that they had not been able to follow their hopes and ambitions. As indicated by Tomlinson's (2008) research, holding a degree does not guarantee high-level work with non-merit characteristics being key in a

competitive job market (Jackson, 2007). Brown and Hesketh (2004) believe graduate recruitment processes favour middle-class students which could be a factor in Christina and Charlotte not securing high-level work upon completing their degree.

Capital holdings are also important for academic and occupational success (Dillon, 2014). Traditionally cultural capital is associated with art, music and literature, though, in the context of graduate employment Burke (2016) relates cultural capital to soft transferable skills which are highly desired by organisations (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) posit that the development of cultural capital is more effective if it is reinforced through experiences at home. Both these respondent's had little practical educational support available from their families with their backgrounds being particularly difficult. Christina was brought up in care and Charlotte's family struggled for employment which led to their home being repossessed. At university they did enhance their cultural and social capital through meeting new people and experiences. However, their overriding lack of economic capital was placing pressure upon them to secure work immediately, regardless of the skill level, as they had no family financial support available either.

In terms of the number of applications made during the final year of their degree, Charlotte had the highest level of engagement with the graduate labour market than any other respondent in my study. After not securing a place she started to reapply for graduate schemes the following year. Burke (2016) posits that being able to perform at interview is a form of cultural capital. However, Charlotte had been unable to reach this stage of the recruitment process to prove her abilities. Within her applications and online tests Charlotte's presentation of herself as a graduating student did not match the requirements of the field indicating hysteresis (Bourdieu, 1977). Charlotte was able to exhibit her employability at a lower skill-level leaving her underemployed in comparison to the qualifications she held. Nunley et al. (2017) warn that starting in a lower position can lead to long-term disadvantage in the job market as it is harder to access opportunities for development and promotion.

Habitus acts as a "structuring structure" (Bourdieu, 1977 p72) that influences an individual's practice, and therefore position in social space. Habitus can also be demonstrated through an individual's agency (Reay, 2004). Christina and Charlotte's difficulty in securing graduate-level work reflected their working-class background as

their practice in relation to the graduate labour market was not congruent to the field to allow them to participate effectively (Bourdieu, 1993a). Both were the first people in their family to attend university and, with no one in high-level employment, they did not have a role model, or anyone close, to ask advice as they tried to secure work. Decoteau (2016) posits reflexivity can lead to change in practice. However, during our interviews neither Christina nor Charlotte were reflective, continuing to apply for jobs using the same approach. Typical of working-class students they wanted to secure work independently (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008) with Christina expressing a sense of pride and Charlotte being too nervous to ask for advice, particularly as she felt her only visit to careers was not helpful. Charlotte said:

Charlotte: “Careers told me to go on these different job sites, but I’ve been looking and I’m still struggling to find smaller businesses to apply to ... I spoke to careers about it (psychometric testing) and they told me to practice and that’s all I’ve done and it’s still the same ... I’m trying to find ways around the psychometric testing.”

Conscious of disadvantage in their backgrounds, Charlotte and Christina attended university to improve their opportunities in life. Social mobility cannot be achieved simply through accessing higher education as consideration should be given to graduate employment outcomes (Brown, 2014). The Department of Education (2017e) acknowledges that it can take time for young people to position themselves in the labour market at a level commensurate with their qualification, though, the DLHE data (BIS, 2011) sets a time frame of six months. Within the scope of my study Christina and Charlotte had not managed to secure graduate-level work. Their working-class background could potentially constrain their long-term achievement indicating continuing inequality in the UK based on social class (OECD, 2015a). I will now consider the next group of students that I have classified as “Not Ready for Work Yet”.

## 6.5 Not Ready for Work Yet

Five respondents, Abdul, Jessica, Louise, Dana and Anna, have been classified as “Not Ready for Work Yet”. I have used this term to represent students who felt they had insufficient skills to secure a graduate-level job. All had progressed immediately

from college to university, attending institutions where continuing on to higher education was expected. Louise felt college had “pushed” her into higher education rather than being allowed to consider other options. At university Dana and Louise had chosen vocationally-focused degrees, Architecture and Photography respectively, while the remaining three studied the broader subjects of Business Management and Sociology that could lead to a wider range of jobs.

Bourdieu (1990b P46) commented that “just as no two individual histories are identical so no two individual habituses are identical”. While this group of respondents have been classified together it must be noted that their individual experiences were different. The personal background factors for this group were the most varied in the “Between Two Worlds” category. Abdul was the only male and from a working-class British Bangladeshi heritage. His parents had immigrated to the UK before he was born to provide their children with better opportunities for education and employment. The remaining respondents in this group were all female, though, there were differences in their family backgrounds. Jessica and Anna were brought up in northern industrial towns and considered themselves to be White British working-class due to their parents’ employment and limited family income. In contrast Dana and Louise were middle-class. Louise was from a White British heritage with her family home being in an affluent semi-rural area, while Dana’s family background was White Eastern European. Originally born overseas, Dana’s family had moved to the UK when she was a young child. She considered herself to be middle-class due to the family’s disposable income that allowed her to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities during her childhood.

At university Abdul and Jessica had continued to live with their families in line with the Sutton Trust’s (2018) findings that working-class students are increasingly concerned about debt. Abdul commented:

Abdul:            “I wanted to live at home because you don’t need to worry about costs.”

In addition to the cost, Abdul also felt he would not be able to cope physically living away from home saying:

Abdul: “I’d struggle to look after myself, I’m not really independent. My mum does everything for me ... I’m reliant solely on her.”

In contrast, Dana, Louise and Anna had moved away from home with Louise saying:

Louise: “I always wanted to do uni away rather than at home. It was more about the experience of living somewhere else.”

Similar living arrangements continued after graduation with Abdul and Jessica remaining at home limiting their job search area to an hour commute. In contrast, Louise, Dana and Anna were geographically mobile which widened their employment opportunities (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Given the diverse backgrounds of this group of students I will now consider their habitus, capital holdings and engagement with the graduate labour market in three sub-groups.

#### 6.5.1 ‘I am the Perfect Balance between East and West’

Walters (2012) defines ethnicity as a shared identity from a common ancestry, culture and language and Abdul’s mother was keen that the family maintained traditions from their Bangladeshi heritage. Living in Britain, Abdul’s elder sister believed that they should also experience Western culture so introduced the family to practices such as celebrating birthdays. Cohen (2006) posits that different cultural elements are often combined to form an individual’s identity and Abdul described his British Bangladeshi heritage saying:

Abdul: “I am the perfect balance between East and West. I can communicate fluently in two languages and I practice the norms and values of the Bangladeshi and British side of me. (When looking for work) if you say you weren’t born here it’s a stigma I think. I prefer to say I was born here.”

As the eldest male in the family Abdul had high expectations placed upon him to act as a role model for his younger siblings. Levant et al. (2018) found that ethnic minority father’s placed excessive hopes for achievement upon their sons which impacted negatively upon their emotions. When he failed his first year of A-levels Abdul recounted that his father had described him as:

Abdul:            “a failure to your brothers and sisters which was at the time upsetting  
                         ... it was a reality check, not just educationally, but culturally as well.”

Abdul therefore restarted college studying different subjects to achieve 168 UCAS points allowing him to progress to university to study Business Management.

After college Abdul had not originally intended to enter higher education. However, growing up in Bangladesh his mother had not had the opportunity for an education herself so she was keen for her children to attend university. Abdul said his mother refers to a degree as a “golden ticket to a good job”. Being close to his mother he decided to conform to her wishes meeting Tomlinson’s (1997) observation that ethnic minority parents view qualifications as a route to success. Bourdieu’s (1984) belief that women focus on the private sphere of home is applicable to Abdul’s mother as she was a major influence on his actions. In addition to continuing his education, she also wanted him to marry within the next five years proposing an arranged marriage if he had not met a partner himself.

Abdul’s paid work experience was limited with a job as a lunchtime supervisor while at college. He had however, gained cultural and social capital through extracurricular activities in his community including volunteering as a support teacher at the Mosque, being a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce and contributing to local regeneration projects by applying for funding and being part of the coordinating team. Abdul found it difficult to construct his employability value from these experiences though (Tomlinson, 2017). Additionally, he had not followed Bridgstock’s (2009) recommendation of undertaking career management activities so he had a poor understanding of the field of graduate labour. He said:

Abdul:            “I don’t know where I want to go in my career and I don’t have a plan.”

Following Greenbank and Hepworth’s (2008) findings, like a number of other working-class students in my study, Abdul did not ask for advice commenting:

Abdul:            “It was something I wanted to do on my own. I felt I had to do it on my own and see if I can stand on my own two feet.”

Living at home Abdul had low economic capital requirements so towards the end of his degree he decided to apply for part-time jobs. His decision was based on taking a break after studying rather than working “flat out” as well as having time to complete his observations for Ramadan over the summer. He also felt his skills were insufficient so part-time work would help him enter the workplace.

Abdul purposefully chose to apply for large organisations believing they offered opportunities for internal progression once he had gained experience. Applying for large organisations meant he had to progress through a multi-stage recruitment process similar to graduate schemes involving application forms, online tests, telephone interviews and assessment centres. Chamberlain (2016) recommends that organisations make adjustments to tasks depending on the level and nature of the role, though, Abdul described them as “rigorous” and “gruelling”.

The rising number of graduates has led to increasing levels of underemployment (Vina, 2016). For Abdul applying for part-time, non-graduate work was a conscious decision, though, given his capital holdings he could potentially have raised his aspirations. Abdul did not demonstrate symbolic mastery (Burke, 2016) of his situation as he did not objectively appreciate his achievements or understand the roles he was subjectively capable of securing in the labour market. Given his educational and cultural capital Abdul quickly found a part-time job as a customer service advisor in a call centre for a leading high street bank. His family considered this to be a good job as working for a well-known multi-national company held prestige.

When speaking to Abdul a year after graduation he explained the bank had wanted him to work full-time, but he had declined three times saying:

Abdul:            “it did strike me if I do go full-time it’s 37 hours a week for one company that I might limit my options and I’ve always been one of these people who likes to have different doors open.”

Instead of increasing his hours, Abdul had started a second part-time job so was now working for one organisation in the morning and the other in the evening. The second job was also as a customer service representative in a call centre for a utility



organisation using the same skill set. Abdul was highly motivated to achieve in the workplace with long-term ambitions to be a manager. Additionally, he had received positive feedback on his performance. However, he was unable to explain the reasons for his actions since graduating except to say he was still undecided about his future so he thought holding two jobs was better for the time being.

Leaving university requires students to reconstruct their identity (Holmes, 2015), and in our final interview Abdul explained he had found the transition to employment difficult which may have contributed towards his actions. He commented:

Abdul:            “it’s taken me a long-time to adjust to not being in education.”

Fouad and Kantamini (2012) found the presence of cultural differences in attitudes towards career development which could also possibly illuminate Abdul’s behaviour. They discovered, as in Abdul’s case, that young people with a family-focused culture remained spatially close to home potentially limiting available job opportunities. Additionally, depending upon ethnic background, they posited that young people followed their parent’s career aspirations for them rather than their own interests. While Abdul’s parents did not specify a career, they did expect him to work for organisations that they perceived as prestigious, so he only applied for nationally recognised, large organisations. Furthermore, Zwysen and Longhi (2016) posit that ethnic minority students from a low-educated family background find it difficult to access advice and resources meaning they have little knowledge of the labour market rules (Bauder, 2005). Since emigrating to the UK Abdul’s parents had learnt to speak English, but could not read and write it so they were unable to offer support. With no professional careers advice either Abdul had low informational capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) to help him decide on employment. Gbadamosi et al. (2015) consider low-skilled work to be valuable as it increases experience and understanding of the workplace. From feedback Abdul’s abilities were valued by his employers increasing his capital holdings for when he was ready to decide upon his future. I will now discuss students who lacked confidence in relation to the graduate labour market.

### 6.5.2 Lacking Confidence for the Graduate Labour Market

Shi (2001) links Bourdieu's approach of structural constructivism to gender power relations, positing that female social practice in relation to objective structures at work is a performance of their subjective dispositions. Annese (2016) comments that women exhibit lower confidence in the workplace, not due to a lack of ability, but to the continuing association of male stereotypes with success. Mark (2014) similarly found that a lack of confidence amongst women, particularly in male dominated professions, acts as a barrier to entry and progression. Bourdieu (2001) believed the gendered hierarchical order was due to the cultural arbitrary perpetuating masculine-based practices in the workplace that disadvantaged women.

Self-confidence is a key stage in Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) employability model as students require self-belief to effectively present themselves at interview (Rothwell et al., 2008). Jessica, Louise and Anna described themselves as shy which is why I have grouped them together as their low-level of personal confidence, accompanied by a quiet disposition, influenced their engagement with the graduate labour market. Jessica said:

Jessica: "I'm really shy, I hate being in front of people."

While Anna reflected on her experience at interview saying:

Anna: "I'm a really shy person ... in interviews you're supposed to brag about yourself and I'm just not like that as a person. So I found interviews were a difficult thing for me."

As recommended by McArthur (2011), Anna and Jessica chose subjects they enjoyed taking Sociology and Business Management respectively. Studying a degree with a range of employment opportunities afterwards can make career choices difficult though (Burtnett, 2010). Pasero (2016) found first generation university students need more support to develop a career vision and, unusually for a working-class student (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008), Anna started to visit careers in her second year at university to help her achieve this commenting:

Anna: “I think I was looking for some possibilities because I was sort of thinking I don’t know what I’m going to do with this degree. Maybe you would if you’d done something that takes you into an occupation.”

After speaking to careers Anna decided she would like to work in Human Resources so applied for a single graduate scheme in this area saying:

Anna: “it was one of those things that I just thought I should do just to say that I’ve done it. If it goes somewhere it does and if it doesn’t then that’s fine”.

Smart et al. (2009) posit graduate schemes favour middle-class applicants who tend to have higher holdings of cultural capital. Anna did not pass the online situational tests finding it difficult to provide supporting examples from her job as a waitress. Additionally, she had pursued individual hobbies such as reading, knitting and running so she did not have extracurricular examples to draw upon either. Anna did not like the impersonal nature of the recruitment process commenting:

Anna: “I think you don’t understand a person if you just do it online”.

Anna decided not to apply for any further graduate schemes, but fully engaged with the labour market in the final two months at university following Blythe’s (2015) recommendations of focusing on small and medium-sized organisations. Anna continued to return to careers for advice on her CV, application forms and interview performance to overcome her shyness. Anna broadened her search to general office work as she found it difficult to demonstrate skills required for the specialist field of HR. As she graduated Anna was offered an office-based role in a medium-sized energy company working as an administrative assistant. While it was a non-graduate role Anna was pleased as she felt she working in an environment where she could develop relevant work-based skills to improve her long-term prospects.

Wilton’s (2011) research indicates that female graduates are more likely to occupy lower-level roles on entering the job market. Data from the Office for National Statistics (2017a) similarly found that female graduates hold lower skilled jobs than males. Structural reasons for this difference relate to women working part-time and childcare

(ONS 2017a) while cultural reasons are based on organisations continuing to favour male characteristics in senior positions (Cunningham & MacRae, 2011).

Similarly to Anna, Jessica also entered the labour market in a non-graduate role. Working in the retail sector for five years Jessica had more work experience so she started the academic year by applying for several graduate schemes including the one at the supermarket chain she worked for. Having previous experience with an organisation can be advantageous as employers are already aware of an individual's abilities (HighFliers, 2018). However, at a meeting with the Store Manager and the People Manager, Jessica was shocked to learn that she was not eligible for the graduate scheme. She was 8 UCAS points short of their minimum entry criteria and additionally, they required candidates with higher-skilled work experience than she had gained through her part-time job with them. The Store Manager did however offer to support her in gaining more experience so she could later apply through the internal management route. Reflecting on this Jessica said:

Jessica: "I've done a degree and I know it's valuable to me, but I still don't have experience ... I've got my foot in the door though and they've said they are willing to help me so I will stick with them to be honest."

Therefore Jessica stopped applying for other organisations and upon graduating started to work full-time as a section leader. Discussing whether she had met her expectations of attending university Jessica said:

Jessica: "I don't think I have yet, but I think I am on my way and I think I will ... I am glad I came to uni ... not for this particular job but, in the long run my degree will help me."

Jessica and Anna adopted a Ritualist (Tomlinson, 2007) approach to searching for work where students are ambivalent to the outcome. Feeling that they had insufficient work experience they accepted non-graduate roles hoping that it would lead to better opportunities in the future.

My final respondent in this group was Louise who had studied Photography. As is common with creative subjects, Louise had taken an Art Foundation year prior to starting university to develop a portfolio and explore different forms of art. Additionally,

during her third year of university she had spent six months on an Erasmus exchange in Poland and six months working as an unpaid intern in a commercial photography studio to develop her industry specific skills. At graduation Louise was 23 and had continuously been in education. She still felt emotionally unprepared to enter the labour market commenting:

Louise:        “The thought of going straight from uni to work is a bit daunting. I’m scared to. I don’t feel that I’m ready experience wise ... I don’t want to grow up and look after myself ... it’s a lot of responsibility.”

Deer (2012 p116) describes doxa as the “cornerstone of any field” impacting upon the reproduction of social structures through shared beliefs. Louise had a limited understanding of the field of photography from university as advice had focused on fine art photography and freelance work where social capital through a network of contacts is essential. Louise however, wanted more financial security and hoped to find regular work in a commercial studio. Additionally, she lacked confidence commenting:

Louise:        “I’m scared to go freelance. I don’t feel I’m ready experience wise”.

As a child Louise had travelled extensively with her middle-class parents who, through transubstantiation (Moore, 2012), had converted their economic capital into as many experiences as possible. Not feeling ready to settle into permanent work, towards the end of her degree Louise decided to spend time travelling explaining:

Louise:        “I want to travel and see the world kind of thing. It’s putting me off applying for a job as I don’t want to get a job I enjoy and then say I’m off now. I still want to go into photography, but I don’t have that urgency anymore.”

Tomlinson (2007) refers to this as “Retreatist” behaviour where students focus on alternative goals to employment. However, to achieve this Louise needed to apply for a visa and raise funds for entry into her preferred country. She therefore purposefully secured a role with her local council not related to photography in order to fulfil her travel ambitions. Targetjobs (n.d.c) advise that employers view travelling after

university favourably providing the experience has led to personal growth and development that can be related to a future career.

I interviewed all three respondents a year later. Jessica and Anna continued to work for the same companies. They had moved around several departments gaining relevant work experience that they planned to use to target graduate roles in the near future. While they believed their companies to be equal opportunity employers they had noted vertical segregation (Wood, 2008) with the majority of managers being male. As recommended by Langowitz et al. (2013) the supermarket operated a women into leadership programme to address the imbalance which Jessica hoped to join. Working for a smaller organisation Anna believed she would have to move organisations for promotion as the current organisational structure was stable offering few opportunities for progression.

Louise had met her aim and was leaving the following month on a two-year working holiday visa where she planned to alternate periods of casual work with travel. She commented:

Louise:        “I didn’t want to get a job I really enjoyed as it would make the decision to travel harder ... I feel my degree helped me to get my job in the council as I had lots of skills ... I still want to go into photography when I come home though.”

To successfully enter a field graduates need to possess relevant capital that they can mobilise to their advantage (Devine & Savage, 2005). Anna and Jessica felt they lacked sufficient work experience for the graduate labour market so accepted lower-level positions with the hope of improving their future prospects. In contrast, Louise chose an alternative path pursuing personal ambitions to travel rather than engaging with the field of photography. I will now consider Dana’s decision to change fields from architecture to journalism.

### 6.5.3 Changing Fields

Dana's middle-class parents had always been involved in her education, encouraging both academic achievement and involvement in extracurricular activities (Crozier et al. 2011). As a child she had private maths lessons to support her school work as well as drawing lessons and studying an additional language for pleasure. Dana's parents had also helped her to evaluate her options when choosing a degree (Davey, 2012). Dana explained her reasons for selecting architecture saying:

Dana: "I liked art, but I had to decide between having an art degree and a degree that can ensure a good job, architecture is probably between. I wanted to do art history for a bit, but gave up on that, I wanted to do fashion, but gave up on that as well. Architecture seemed to be a lot more stable."

Upon starting university, Dana found aspects of the course did not meet her expectations commenting:

Dana: "I've changed my mind about architecture. I like the theory of design and the history of architecture, but the practical part is hard. You have to think about installation and bolts and structure and that's where they lost me."

Fields are socially constructed spaces with those in positions of power creating the rules for entry and progression (Bourdieu, 1984). Dana explained that the field of architecture was tightly structured taking seven years in total to qualify with a series of professional placements and qualifications required after graduating from her first degree. Without contacts in the profession she was finding it difficult to secure a placement so she was exploring switching to journalism with a focus on writing about design and architecture. I have placed Dana in the "Not Ready for Work Yet" category as she was at the early stages of exploring this new career option, aware that a change of field would require the development of new skills prior to entry. The DLHE data (BIS, 2011) classifies studying for a postgraduate qualification as a graduate-level outcome, but as Dana had not yet applied for a masters course her path after finishing her degree was not certain.

Thompson et al. (2013) advise students to strategically choose their activities at university to enhance their employability with Tomlinson (2008) positing that this advice is followed more by middle-class students. Conscious that journalism can also be a difficult field to enter, requiring specific qualifications and experience of writing, Dana had begun to enhance her capital during her second year at university. Pursuing her interest in writing, Dana started a regular newspaper for her university department eventually being the chief editor for a team of 12 contributors. To develop her writing skills, and gain informational capital on a career in journalism, Dana also attended a literature summer course where the tutors were experienced journalists and writers.

To pursue her new aim of becoming a journalist Dana needed to take a specialist masters to develop her writing skills. Bourdieu (1984) correlates educational capital to cultural capital meaning postgraduate study would increase Dana's chances of entry to the field. Dana's parents were supporting her change of career. She said:

Dana: "My mum always wanted me to do journalism because she thought I was good at writing. I really enjoyed it, but I didn't agree with her and wanted to do something in design. With hindsight she might have been right."

Fugate et al. (2004) posit that employability is a multi-dimensional concept combining career identity, personal adaptability and human capital allowing individuals to exert their agency when operating in combination. Additionally, Jackson (2016) advocates the development of a pre-professional identity where students align themselves with the ideology of the field. I did not hear back from Dana after graduation, but towards the end of her degree she was using her middle-class background to maintain an advantageous position in relation to the graduate labour market (Crossley, 2012). Recognising that she might not pursue a career in architecture she was beginning to reconstruct her identity as a journalist Through reflection Dana understood her skills and abilities (Dyke et al., 2012) so was now focusing on acquiring the relevant cultural and social capital to position herself to enter the field of journalism.



#### 6.5.4 Summary of Respondents Not Ready for Work Yet

Grenfell and James (1998) refer to habitus as being subjective, influencing an agent's relationship with the field. Habitus is a multi-layered concept with Bourdieu (1977) discussing a collective class habitus to recognise that people sharing the same social space tend to share the same practice. At an individual level interpretations become more complex (Reay, 2004), and since the "Not Ready for Work Yet" group were from diverse backgrounds, personal differentiating factors influenced their engagement with the graduate labour market.

Bathmaker et al. (2013) posit working-class students find the competitive graduate labour market more challenging than their middle-class peers as their family habitus means they are less familiar with graduate-level practices in the workplace. Through ordinary reflection (Noble & Watkins, 2003) the three working-class members of this group, Abdul, Jessica and Anna, were conscious of their limited skills and work experience. To better position themselves in the future they secured non-graduate roles and actively engaged in enhancing their employability through work-based training and development.

In contrast, Louise and Dana had studied vocational degrees to enter the specific fields of photography and architecture. Fields are dynamic spaces and in certain ones social capital can be crucial for success (Webb et al., 2002). However, Louise and Dana did not have a network of contacts in their respective fields to secure work upon graduation. In line with Pasero's (2016) findings, as first-generation students they did not avail themselves of the university careers services. They did however, draw upon their middle-class background and participate in extracurricular activities at university that later influenced their career decisions upon graduation (Stuart et al., 2015). Dana decided to reskill through further study to switch fields to journalism; while Louise, from her membership of the ski society and Erasmus exchange programme, pursued her personal ambition to travel.

Moreau and Leathwood (2006) believe employment outcomes upon graduation are influenced by class, gender and ethnicity with at least one characteristic applying to each member of the group. Following Snee and Devine's (2014) findings, Dana and Louise were able to use their advantaged background to exert their agency by taking

action to meet their personal ambitions. On the other hand, upon accepting non-graduate work, Abdul, Jessica and Anna all had a sense of not yet fulfilling their potential, but they were purposively increasing their capital to enhance their personal trajectory (Bourdieu, 1984). Living at university Anna had actively engaged with careers using their advice to overcome personal barriers such as shyness at interview. As commuter students Jessica and Abdul had not participated in opportunities to enhance their employability spending higher-levels of time away from campus (Cashmore, 2017). To summarise, while these respondents were “Not Ready for Work Yet” they were all proactive and engaged with the graduate labour market taking actions that they hoped would fulfil their longer-term ambitions. I will now summarise the barriers to graduate employment faced by the “Between Two Worlds” group before concluding the chapter.

#### 6.6 Barriers to Graduate Employment for Respondents Classified as “Between Two Worlds”

The barriers faced by the “Between Two Worlds” group were similar to those in the previous chapter, though, the context of some has been altered to accommodate the group. For example, rather than a lack of career plan which prevented engagement in the previous chapter, it has been amended to limited career plans as the group did engage with the labour market with their career plans developing during the year.

Table 6.2 Summary of Barriers to Graduate Employment for Respondents Classified as “Between Two Worlds”

	Barrier to Graduate Employment	Respondents Affected
1.	Limited career plans on entering the final year	All respondents
2.	Lack of geographical mobility	Darren, Adele, Sally, Abdul, Jessica
3.	No sustained involvement in extracurricular activities at university	All except Dana and Louise
4.	Low-skilled work experience	All respondents
5.	Lack of economic capital	Charlotte, Christina, Anna
6.	Lack of social capital	Limited for all respondents
7.	Quiet disposition/ low-level of confidence in their engagement with the labour market	Jessica, Louise, Anna, Charlotte, Christina
8.	No practical advice and guidance available from parents	All except Dana
9.	Low informational capital due to not engaging with the careers service	All except Adele, Sally and Anna
10.	Low UCAS points	Darren, Charlotte, Jessica
11.	Gendered, cultural and religious expectations from family members	Adele, Sally, Abdul
12.	Knowledge of the graduate recruitment process (only if applied for graduate jobs)	Darren, Charlotte, Christina, Jessica, Anna
13.	Time management to handle study and applications	Darren, Charlotte, Jessica

Hills et al. (2015) found that structural inequality makes it difficult for graduates to exert their agency in the UK labour market after completing their degree with those from disadvantaged backgrounds facing multiple, inter-related barriers. Overall, the barriers for this group were slightly lower than the respondents classified as “Fish out of Water”. For example, only three members of this group had low UCAS points in comparison to six in the previous chapter. Additionally, in the previous chapter three barriers had applied to all respondents while the pattern was more varied in this group reflecting the subjective nature of experiences. As the “Between Two Worlds” group had engaged with the graduate labour market two additional barriers were added. These were the ability to negotiate the graduate recruitment process and time management to handle study and applications.

Background characteristics have again presented barriers to graduate employment reinforcing Okay-Somerville and Scholaris’ (2017) research that working class, female and ethnic minority graduates find it more difficult to negotiate the transition from education to employment. Two of these background characteristics applied to everyone in the group except Louise and Darren. As a White British middle-class student Louise’s main barrier was a lack of confidence which is often associated with female graduates (O’Leary, 2017). While Darren’s working-class background initially meant his practice did not meet the requirements of the graduate labour market (Bathmaker et al., 2013). However, through reflection he adjusted his approach to secure a graduate job eighteen months after his first application. Having identified the barriers to graduate employment I will now summarise my findings for the students classified as “Between Two Worlds”.

## 6.7 Chapter Summary

Bourdieu’s use of the word *le champ* refers to the concept of field as a site of struggle (Thomson, 2012) which could be considered appropriate for the students classified as “Between Two Worlds”. They had entered university to pursue academic achievement as well as hoping to improve their employment opportunities. Employability has a subjective element, relating to an individual’s ability to secure work as well as an objective element relating to the structure of the labour market (Hetty van Emmerik et al., 2012). While this group had improved their subjective employability through

attending university, upon entering the labour market they were objectively constrained by a range of barriers based on their personal background circumstances (Roberts, 2009). The working-class respondents in this group can be likened to Burke's (2016) Static Working Class as they entered non-graduate employment after university. However, their actions could also be considered proactive as they saw the roles as an opportunity to develop their capital holdings in terms of skills, abilities and work experience to gain a better position in the graduate labour market at a later date if desired.

The Department for Education (2017e) points out that it can take some graduates longer to transfer from the field of education to graduate employment. However, the DLHE survey, measuring employment outcomes six months after graduation (BIS, 2011), means universities place pressure upon students to search for work during their final year. In reality choosing which field to enter is a major life decision with lasting implications so taking longer to complete the transition from education to graduate-level employment should not be viewed negatively (Curnock Cook cited in Yorke, 2017). This factor therefore, influenced my decision to refer to this group as "Between Two Worlds" as they were still on a journey towards realising their long-term career ambitions.

The drive towards marketisation means an increasingly utilitarian view is taken of higher education with employment being a key measure of success (Weber, 2014). However, respondents in this group such as Adele, Louise, Anna and Sally valued the experience of higher education itself (McArthur, 2011) indicating a wider understanding of success from attending university is required rather than focusing on employment outcomes. The group were proud of their academic achievements and had enjoyed the challenge of studying at a higher-level. The majority of the group were also satisfied with their employment situation viewing it as a stepping-stone to a more promising future. They believed they would achieve their career expectations once they had acquired more experience (Anna, Darren and Jessica), relevant qualifications (Dana and Sally), identified the career they wanted to enter (Adele) and were themselves ready to settle into a graduate-level role (Abdul and Louise). Only Christina and Charlotte, who faced significant financial problems, expressed frustration and disappointment in their situation.

To participate effectively in a field, practice has to be congruent to the logic of the field (Bourdieu, 1993a). The different stages in the recruitment process, whether for employment or masters courses, require applicants to demonstrate how they meet the entry criteria. When interviewing Dana and Sally they had not yet applied for postgraduate study so were unable to comment on the process. The remaining respondents had applied for graduate work, describing their experience of the recruitment process as scary (Jessica and Anna), nerve-wracking (Charlotte and Abdul), daunting (Darren), mind-boggling (Christina) and hard work (Adele). When rejected by organisations they also found it disheartening, confusing and difficult to understand what other actions they could take to improve their applications. The “Between Two Worlds” group was dominated by working-class students and, as suggested by Bathmaker et al. (2013), it would appear they could benefit from additional support during their degree to better present themselves in a competitive job market.

While academic qualifications can be used to access higher-level jobs (Hogan et al., 2013), graduate recruiters also base their decisions on non-meritocratic characteristics which are less likely to be exhibited by working-class students (Jackson, 2007). The students in my study rarely received feedback as to why they did not progress through the graduate application process, tending to see their rejection as a lack of ability on their part in relation to the recruiters’ expectations. Bourdieu (1977) refers to systems, such as the graduate recruitment process, that allows those in positions of power to exert their domination over individuals trying to gain access to a field as being symbolically violent and legitimising inequality (Wacquant, 2008). Schubert (2012) posits that symbolic violence is often invisible and misrecognised as a form of oppression. The graduate labour market is a series of fields with each industry, and in some cases organisation, having its own rules for entry and progression. Possessing at least one background characteristic associated with disadvantage (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006) this group’s challenges in securing graduate work should be related to structural barriers that can be difficult to overcome rather than a lack of personal ability (Hills et al., 2015).

Having analysed the students classified as “Between Two Worlds”, in the next chapter I will discuss the students referred to as “The Game Players” who were in graduate employment or further study within six months of completing their degree. While these

graduates met expected employment outcomes (BIS, 2011) their entry to the labour market indicates the subjective nature of employability with each one's experiences being personal to their own circumstances.

## **Chapter Seven – “The Game Players” strategically engaged and successful in the graduate labour market**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Chapter Seven presents my analysis of the respondents classified as “The Game Players” who strategically engaged with the graduate labour market during their final year. Ten of the respondents secured a job requiring a degree with the remaining student taking a masters that was a pre-requisite for entering her chosen field. As already discussed in Chapter Six the current measure of success at university using the DLHE survey (BIS, 2011) is to be in employment or studying for a masters within six months of graduation. I have therefore used this as my measure of time when discussing student outcomes. By securing a graduate job this group fulfils the aim that higher education is a route to skilled employment (BIS, 2016). Additionally, with 55% of the group being working class, and from the middle-class respondents only two having parents with degrees, this group also meets the Conservative Government’s aspirations of higher education leading to improved social mobility (Department for Education, 2017d). Collini (2012) and Lawson (2012) believe a wider view should be taken of success in higher education as it is important to develop intellectual capabilities and the capacity to challenge current thinking rather than a functionalist view of training future managers (Piercy, 2011). In my analysis I will consider the respondent’s approach to higher education in relation to these two perspectives.

In this chapter I will firstly identify the respondents classified as “The Game Players”. Reasons for being classified in this group have been divided into three themes; ambitious career plans, a graduate disposition and job satisfaction. I will then discuss, through the lens of habitus, reasons for placing each student into the group along with their experiences of engaging with the graduate labour market during their final year of study and first year after graduation. Through my discussion I will consider their holdings of capital and their understanding of the field of graduate-level employment. I will conclude the chapter with a summary of their position in relation to the graduate labour market including a consideration of barriers they faced.



## 7.2 Research Participants Classified as “The Game Players”

Eleven respondents have been classified as “The Game Players” with the group representing the breadth of background characteristics in the study. Ethnicity and class are close to the proportion of the number in the sample with 18% being from ethnic minorities and 55% being working class. Males were slightly over-represented in the group at 45% as they formed 35% of the sample. I have noted the background of each respondent in Table 7.1 along with brief reasons for their inclusion in this group. Following the table I will explore the experiences of students in more detail starting with those holding ambitious career plans.

Table 7.1 Research Participants Classified as “The Game Players”

Interview Number	Name	Reasons for being in the category
2	<b>Rachel</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Ambitious Career Plans</b> Worked for two years prior to university and consciously returned to improve work opportunities. Completed placement and behaved strategically throughout to return to the organisation.
3	<b>Rohema</b> Female Middle class British Pakistani	<b>Graduate Disposition</b> Left searching until late in the academic year, but secured position quickly once started applying. Poor cultural fit with first company so moved onto a graduate scheme at the end of the year.
5	<b>David</b> Male Working class White British	<b>Ambitious Career Plans</b> Ambitious and work-oriented. Completed placement and struggled with aspects of being directed. Attended careers to strategically position himself and quickly secured a place on a graduate scheme.
6	<b>Holly</b> Female Middle class White British	<b>Graduate Disposition</b> Initially struggled with graduate schemes due to psychometric testing. Focused on smaller organisations and immediately secured work through directly targeting organisations.
12	<b>Dilip</b> Male Working class British Indian	<b>Ambitious Career Plans</b> Money oriented and highly ambitious in terms of earnings. Short-term contract work in the financial services industry due to enhanced pay.
14	<b>Grace</b> Female Working class White British	<b>Graduate Disposition</b> Analysed skills and abilities and then used careers service to help identify potential fields. Did not want a graduate scheme. Secured work within a week of starting to apply.

15	<b>Beth</b> Female Middle class White British	<b>Ambitious Career Plans</b> Identified specific career path during degree. Focused on acquiring appropriate experience to enter chosen field. Requires a postgraduate qualification first and upon completion immediately moves into the sector.
16	<b>Emily</b> Female Middle class White British	<b>Job Satisfaction</b> Returned to placement organisation in a creative industry. Role did not meet her expectations. Decided she wanted to be a teacher so secured place on an in-service teaching degree.
17	<b>Philip</b> Male Working class White British	<b>Job Satisfaction</b> Returned to placement organisation working in a creative industry. Primary focus is job satisfaction. Unconventional, but effective approach to searching for work.
19	<b>Jake</b> Male Working class White British	<b>Graduate Disposition</b> Returned to placement organisation. Appreciated significance of networking so maintained contact during the year until he heard a position was available and he asked to apply.
20	<b>Warren</b> Male Working class White British	<b>Job Satisfaction</b> Returned to placement organisation working in a creative industry. Primary focus is job satisfaction. Good networking skills which he used to his advantage.

### 7.3 Ambitious Career Plans

I have classified four students as having ambitious career plans; Rachel, David and Dilip who all studied Business Management and Beth who had studied History. All were the first generation in their family to attend university. The background characteristics of the group were different though, indicating the subjective nature of habitus and that, when exposed to new experiences such as education (Reay, 2004), an individual has the potential to break from the outcomes in life that are expected of them (Bourdieu, 1990a). I will discuss their different background characteristics as I explore their habitus following Bourdieu's later belief that agency resides within the individual rather than being determined by the structures they inhabit (Rawolle & Lingard, 2008). Actions are frequently bound up with the past (Schlosser, 2013) so my discussion will consider barriers that potentially objectively constrained the students and influenced their decisions. I have broken the discussion into three

sections to consider the student's habitus as they varied distinctly, firstly considering David and Rachel who both gained places on leading graduate schemes.

### 7.3.1 Gaining a Place on a Graduate Scheme

David and Rachel were both from a White British working-class background with the main difference between them being their gender. Adopting an economic view, they stated their main reason for attending university was to enhance their career prospects which is in line with the Conservative Government's aim of education leading to higher-level jobs (BIS, 2016). David commented:

David: "In my opinion a university degree is a way to get into a job so if you're not even going to look for a job there's no point doing the degree."

David had progressed to university straight from college. In contrast, Rachel had worked for a year in banking, but quickly realised there was little opportunity for progression without higher-level qualifications. Commenting on her decision to return to university she said:

Rachel: "my manager really motivated me and I wanted to get to that position ... I thought if I go to university I'll learn all the skills I want to learn plus extra."

Rachel had been heavily involved in extracurricular activities at school playing hockey, being a member of the choir and outside school she played in a youth band attached to her local church. David's involvement had mainly revolved around sport playing in the hockey and football teams. Stuart et al. (2011) found that working-class students are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities while at university; however, habitus is the result of past experiences (Silva, 2015). Having been involved in capital acquiring activities in their childhood they continued this practice at university. Research by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014c) indicates that students who live on campus are more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities and as Rachel and David had moved away to study they had immersed themselves in university life. They both joined the Ski Society and Rachel was a founding member of a new Business Society which David also joined.

A further capital enhancing activity offered through their degree was the opportunity to take a placement year. Students voluntarily attended workshops to learn about the benefits of work experience (Brooks & Youngson, 2016) and the application process. Rachel commented on her decision to take a placement:

Rachel: “I came to uni and ended up going on placement which I didn’t expect to do, but I saw the value of it so I decided to take one.”

David also made his decision after starting university saying:

David: “It was very much the first year of university that made that change ... I thought gaining some work experience sounded really cool.”

David’s long-term goal was to achieve job satisfaction through challenging and interesting work. In contrast, Rachel was motivated by money and wanted a placement that would provide long-term, high-paid opportunities. Before applying she researched different fields and decided upon the IT sector saying:

Rachel: “it’s an industry that’s never going to disappear ... the money is also a big aspect. You can earn an absolutely amazing wage because of the commission.”

Rachel made only one carefully targeted application. Quickly progressing through a multi-stage recruitment process that mirrored the graduate one, she secured a twelve-month placement in a multi-national IT company. Offered on a national basis, these roles were highly competitive so at each stage she had visited the placement office to ensure that her actions would meet the organisation’s expectations.

In comparison, David had applied for over forty placements before securing one in a small family run holiday business. He had adopted a scatter-gun approach to his applications sending generic forms to multiple organisations which is viewed by industry as poor practice (Targetjobs, n.d.a). David acknowledged it was a mistake saying:

David: “I applied to as many as I could and then none were very good. They were all mediocre applications.”

Reay (2004) posits that the interplay between past and present leads to the development of habitus that can potentially alter an individual's trajectory. Drawing on their placement experience Rachel and David only had to engage with the graduate labour market for a short-time to secure jobs. Through a combination of their attributes and strategies they fulfilled Misra and Mishra's (2011) interactionist view of employability where an individual achieves meaningful employment through targeting their abilities and personal characteristics to meet the demands of the labour market.

Reay (2004) posits that habitus is permeable and, as it is formed by an individual's environment, a change in surroundings can lead to an altered habitus. David's success in the graduate labour market was the result of a changed habitus as he altered his previous practice. Visiting careers before term started he adopted a new approach by applying to five graduate schemes commenting:

David: "if you spend time on one application you are going to have more success than applying to ten; less, but good applications."

In two months David progressed through all the stages from initial application to assessment centre to be offered a place on the graduate scheme for an international logistics firm.

Rachel was similarly looking for a graduate scheme, again making a single application to return to her placement organisation. Nationally approximately a third of graduates secure jobs in organisations that they have previously worked for (High Fliers, 2018). On her placement Rachel had started to align her habitus to the field by forming a 'pre-professional identity' (Jackson, 2016 p1) consciously developing the skills, attributes and behaviours expected in the sector. Rachel also engaged in social capital enhancing activities to raise her profile. Indicating symbolic mastery in her actions she commented:

Rachel: “I’d done a lot of give back work which is volunteering for the company outside and that gave me a lot of exposure. I also did a couple of risk taking things which turned out well. I was at a town hall meeting and the new CEO came down to talk. There was 200 people there and at the questions at the end I put my hand up and asked if I could shadow him so I went and sat on the board for a day.”

Due to her successful placement performance Rachel explained she did not have to go through the full application process:

Rachel: “I basically had a telephone interview which wasn’t really an interview it was my manager telling me what I’d be doing. That’s skipping so many steps in the application process I was overwhelmed. I’d obviously done well on placement. They rank the 300 placement students and if you are in the top percentile you just have a telephone interview.”

One of the barriers faced by women in the workplace can be a lack of female role models (Enache et al., 2011), particularly in male dominated industries such as IT (ONS, 2017a). Having a female manager had enthused Rachel. She said:

Rachel: “my manger inspired me and I wanted to be like her. It made me realise that there’s no limitations, you do (emphasised) what you set out to do.”

Interviewing Rachel and David twelve months after graduation they were both progressing on their graduate schemes. Through their work they had experienced the influence of class and gender in the workplace. While the organisation was an equal opportunities employer Rachel knew the IT industry was gendered as she was one of 5 women on a project team of 52.

Working in a male dominated environment had impacted on Rachel’s behaviours as she explained:

Rachel: “I am learning about football. I was finding that I couldn’t connect to some of the guys as much as I wanted to and I was like why am I not doing it? I looked at other women who could and they do things like they have an interest in sport, they talk about football, they talk about rugby. They get in with that kind of banter.”

Rachel’s behaviour supports Powell et al.’s (2009) work that women entering male-dominated industries change their behaviours and reconstruct their notion of self in order to be accepted. Rachel also had ambitious plans for progression within the organisation, not only to earn more money, but to be recognised at a senior level for her achievements. As a consequence Rachel was already unsure if children would limit her career opportunities saying:

Rachel: “the thought of having kids now is just so not me because I am so career focused and I am selfish. If you have kid’s that’s it, life-over”

Simoni, Mu and Collins (2017) found that while career focused women envisage having children they consciously delay motherhood until they have successfully established themselves in their chosen career. While Rachel was not discounting the possibility of having children they did not form part of her current plan. Rachel’s attitude is a sharp contrast to Lydia’s, another White British working-class female in the “Fish out of Water” category, who was marrying upon graduation and planning a family rather than engaging with work opportunities. Both Rachel and Lydia valued their education however, their decisions demonstrate the individualised nature of graduate outcomes and that success cannot solely be measured in terms of employment.

Working for a logistics company David had also encountered horizontal segregation (Wood, 2008). He observed that the warehouses were male dominated while the Human Resource department he worked in was 95% female, reinforcing Huppatz’s (2012) point that women tend to be drawn into gendered roles. Describing his observations he said:

David: “There’s a couple of girls on the scheme and they are struggling due to their gender really. It’s a male dominated industry and there’s a lot who are not happy about having a woman in charge ... it’s just the warehouse really. I’m in a female dominated environment and I have issues at my end, but the other way around.”

Issues for David meant feeling uncomfortable listening to female-oriented conversations in the office as well as being in the minority on company social events.

Experiences such as this reinforce gender divisions in society (Stark, 2014) with Bourdieu (2000) viewing masculine domination as a form of symbolic violence. While Rachel was challenging gender stereotypes by entering the field of IT, she was also consciously modifying her behaviours, and potentially reconfiguring her identity, to be promoted in the male dominated environment. David only worked in Human Resources for six months as the company rotated graduates around positions so he was unable to comment on long-term issues.

At our first interview David and Rachel had self-identified as working class based on the fact that their upbringing had been comfortable, but without excessive money to spare. As working-class students with limited family economic capital earning money had been a factor in their drive to secure graduate employment. Rachel desired money to acquire expensive material possessions while David did not want to move back home so he needed an income to live independently. Their attitude contrasts to middle-class students such as Mark and Chloe in the “Fish out of Water” category and Louise in “Between Two Worlds” who were not under financial pressure so money did not form a key factor in their decision making.

From working in a professional environment Rachel had begun to feel different commenting:

Rachel: “I think I’m moving to middle class because of how I’m holding myself. I walk into posh places now and feel I deserve to be there. I’ve worked hard to get where I am.”



In contrast, David felt “more working class”. While he did not feel that the organisation itself was classed he felt that individual staff disapproved of some of his mannerisms which he found difficult to handle. He commented:

David: “The other day I was eating out and I put my elbows on the table which isn’t a problem for me. I don’t have an issue with that, but my co-workers tutted at me for doing it (laughing) and we weren’t in a classy establishment, it was a big shock really.”

Habitus is a system ‘of durable, transposable dispositions’ (Bourdieu, 1977 p72), however, exposure to new experiences has the potential to alter an individual’s practice (McNay, 2000). In contrast to Burke’s (2016) Strategic Working Class students who had low employment expectations, Rachel and David had high ambitions and were confident in their abilities for progression in the graduate labour market. By consciously engaging with the opportunities available they appear to have overcome potential objective constraints (Fowler, 1997) that they may have faced as working-class students to enter their chosen field with a promising future. They were both geographically mobile, prioritising their career over personal considerations as they completed their degree.

### 7.3.2 Motivated by Money

Similarly to the other ethnic minority students in my study, Dilip’s continuation on to higher education had been influenced by his parents (Tomlinson, 1997). Dilip, a working-class male from a British Indian heritage, had always been pushed to succeed. He said:

Dilip: “Being Indian is a massive influence when it comes to work. You are expected to work hard and be successful... It’s always been I’m going to university to get a job afterwards, doing something educated so not coming to university was not an option.”

When asked how his family would measure his long-term success he replied “by money.” Dilip believed his attitude towards money was linked to his cultural

background as his paternal grandfather owned a business in the Middle East and his maternal uncles were in high-paying jobs in the IT field. Dilip commented:

Dilip: “Indian people tend to be quite good business people and they can manage their money well. Being Indian financial motivation is a big thing.”

Throughout our interviews Dilip articulated his high career ambitions in terms of money and, like his parents; he adopted an economic view to attending university saying:

Dilip: “the goal was to go to university to get a degree that will open the door to a job that pays well.”

He attached his desire for a high salary to childhood where he had experienced a lack of economic capital commenting:

Dilip: “it’s from not always having a lot of money from being young. I know my Mum and Dad struggled ... he worked a lot of hours a week to put food on the table. I want to not have to worry too much about money ... when I’m 25 I want to be earning £40, 000. I’ve got uncles who have done that and it’s a competition we’ve got between us so I need to be a little bit better than them.”

Bourdieu and Accordo (1999) found that a lack of capital resources limits opportunities. Therefore, to provide himself with material possessions that his parents could not afford Dilip started his first part-time job at 16. As a consequence he stopped attending extracurricular activities including karate and kickboxing where he had progressed to being a black belt. Alexander et al. (2015) found that due to disadvantage ethnic minority students are likely to underperform academically and Dilip acknowledged that working had impacted on his studies as he achieved 96 UCAS points which was lower than he had hoped for. He said:

Dilip: “I probably should have worked less, but I needed the money at the same time.”

Dilip was the only member of the group with ambitious career plans not to take work experience as part of his degree. Work experience is a key component to employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) and having worked in a variety of organisations, Dilip felt he had accumulated sufficient capital to be successful in the graduate labour market.

Again, focusing on economic capital, Dilip had lived at home during university to minimise his costs and he planned to continue doing so after graduation saying:

Dilip: “if I’m living at home I’m not paying out rent and I can save money. It seems counterproductive to move away to spend all your money on rent when I’ve got everything at home for nothing.”

As most graduate schemes require geographical mobility Dilip limited his field of opportunity by only applying on a regional basis. Being motivated by money meant he only considered the financial cost of moving away rather than the wider range of job opportunities available, both immediately and longer-term, if he extended his field beyond an hour’s commute.

When discussing his experiences of the graduate application process Dilip felt it was “overcomplicated”. For one organisation he had to complete a video interview where he spoke to a camera rather than interacting with a person describing the experience as:

Dilip: “Really weird because it wasn’t human at all.”

Dilip progressed to several assessment centres, but was surprised to find that other applicants were older than him having worked for several years already. He felt the reason he did not secure a place was due to his lack of experience in comparison to other applicants.

Dilip’s mother was the second generation of her family in the UK, but his father had been brought up in India. He did not discuss his applications with his parents saying:

Dilip: “They don’t know how difficult it is to get a graduate job. They think a degree is a get out of jail free card and that you are able to get a job straightaway.”

Dilip gathered his informational capital online rather than attending careers. However, he did have access to social capital through an aunt who had attended university and secured a graduate job ten years previously. Sharing her experience, she helped him with his applications and preparation for interview.

When I interviewed Dilip twelve months later he explained how his work had changed during the year. Initially he continued in his part-time job, but on increased hours. Quickly realising it was too low-skilled to offer him progression he started to search again for graduate-level roles using the criteria of a £20, 000 minimum salary and requiring a degree. Focusing on individual positions Dilip secured a job in a specialist service department at a bank working as a contractor rather than employee of the organisation due to a higher salary. Within a few months a similar contract at a competitor bank arose paying more money so Dilip moved saying:

Dilip:            “I work as a contractor because it’s the money at the end of the day. I can’t justify doing the same job for half the money.”

Contracting meant he was continuously looking for new opportunities. However, Dilip did not mind as the high pay had allowed him to save sufficient money to buy a house that he rented out to increase his income.

As a working class ethnic minority student Dilip possessed background characteristics that can lead to disadvantage in employment outcomes (Lessard-Philips et al., 2015; Zwysen & Longhi, 2016). While his low UCAS points, and wish to live at home, presented potential barriers to entering the graduate labour market he actively engaged with the field to find opportunities. Tactics to enter a field vary due to habitus (Naidoo, 2004) and, while not overtly reflective in his behaviours, Dilip had consciously pursued contract work due to the high pay.

Zuccotti’s (2015) research established that graduates from an Indian background were successful in improving their social position in comparison to their parents. Dilip believed he would always be working class and value money due to his origins commenting:

Dilip: “When I have children I wouldn’t want them to lose sight of what is important which is working hard. I think people who get it put on a plate for them don’t have the same charisma, the same drive as the people who have really had to work for it.”

However, in comparison to his upbringing Dilip was pleased with his employment outcomes believing he was on route to achieve his long-term money-based aspirations.

### 7.3.3 Understanding and Positioning in the Field

Beth, the final respondent in the ambitious career plans group, was female and from a White British middle-class background. Brought up in an affluent northern town, her non-graduate parents held management positions at work and she spent all her spare time horse riding. Attending a selective grammar school Beth was torn between studying philosophy and history at university, but decided on the latter as she felt it offered more career options. In contrast to the other three respondents with ambitious career plans Beth did not solely adopt an economic view to university as she also wanted to acquire cultural capital through an enriching experience. While she was aware of studying in relation to a future career she was motivated to study an academic subject that would lead to satisfying employment. She commented:

Beth: “I’ve always really enjoyed history. As long as I can remember it’s been one of my favourite subjects. One of my crowning moments at primary school was going to (museum), I absolutely loved it. History gives you transferable skills for different jobs after your degree.”

Beth had originally intended to enter the legal profession by taking a law conversion course after university. In the second year of her History degree she had to complete six weeks voluntary work experience, but without contacts in the legal sector she struggled to find a placement. Discussing her difficulties she said:

Beth: “I thought if it’s this much (emphasised) stress getting work experience what am I going to be like trying to get a conversion, trying to get a job.”

While the field of education and the graduate labour market operate in close proximity to each other they are not homologous (Tholen, 2015). Therefore, the history course leader organised talks to help students learn about potential careers to bring the two fields closer. Beth was particularly inspired by a speaker at a world heritage site in the region saying:

Beth:            “I was like actually your job sounds fantastic ... so I started applying for work experience in the heritage sector.”

Beth explained experience was essential for entry to the field so she completed her placement at a stately home which led to a paid seasonal job further enhancing her capital holdings. Jackson and Wilton (2017) advocate that work experience forming part of an individual’s career development plan has a positive impact upon employability which supports my reason for including Beth in the ambitious career plans category. Once Beth became interested in heritage she spoke to her tutors and careers before purposively enhancing her employability skills by acquiring capital relevant to entering the field.

Batistic and Tymon (2017) posit that networking is also crucial to developing employability. Beth deliberately spoke to senior people in the heritage sector, developing a network of contacts and gaining inside knowledge on the field. From networking Beth learnt that further study was also essential:

Beth:            “every single person I’ve come into contact with has said to me do your masters because you will not be able to get far in this game if you do not do it now.”

Continuing to masters-level study was also reinforced by her tutors at university. Beth commented:

Beth:            “We went to a research seminar and went for a few drinks and a tutor said oh you should do a masters. I put it at the back of my mind and did some more research and realised it would be good for me.”

After graduating Beth progressed on to a specialist heritage masters to further enhance her chances of entering the field.

Habitus is made visible by an individual's behaviours with their social background being reflected through hexis (Bourdieu, 1977). Beth's hexis demonstrated confidence and self-belief as she had felt comfortable when engaging with senior people within the field. Once she had decided upon a career Beth exhibited practical mastery in her approach to the field taking her actions to gather the necessary capital for granted (Strandbu & Steen-Johnson, 2014). From all the students I interviewed Beth was the most focused on where she would specifically like to work in the future, and the steps she was planning to achieve this, exhibiting a high-level of symbolic mastery. In comparison to other students taking a masters in my study Beth targeted a specialist course with a specific job role in mind rather than taking a masters to enter the sector in a broad sense or to continue studying as an alternative to employment

In relation to the heritage field Beth's doxa appears compatible as she identified and overcame any potential barriers to entry. She had acquired high educational capital, including a specialist masters, to meet the qualifications criteria. She had also gained relevant work experience and could clearly articulate her skills and abilities in relation to the field. The value of capital is influenced by the worth of the holder (Bourdieu, 1984). Beth's middle-class disposition marked her at an advantageous position in social space and she effectively used the capital at her disposal to construct herself as employable in her chosen field (Bathmaker et al. 2013). With holdings of cultural and social capital that were symbolically recognised in the heritage field, Beth secured a position as a collections manager in a city world famous for its heritage. Her three-year plan was now complete and she had fulfilled her wish "to work hands on with history."

#### 7.4 Summary of Respondents with Ambitious Career Plans

Okay-Somerville and Scholaris (2017) posit that female, working class and ethnic minority students are more likely to face barriers to developing their employability. The four respondents with ambitious career plans all presented at least one of these background characteristics indicating the subjective nature of habitus, but also the

potential for individual agency to change opportunities in life (Rawolle & Lingard, 2008). The different fields offering graduate employment did present objective structures that set limits to some choices that influenced practice within the group (Fowler, 1997). For example, Beth had originally intended to enter law, but without social contacts in the field she was unable to gain work experience so she switched to the heritage sector which was accessible. Similarly, Dilip had not gained entry to a graduate scheme so he modified his approach, applying to a broad range of jobs that required a degree. Securing a short-term contract to meet his pay expectations, Dilip exemplifies Holck's (2016) findings that ethnic minority students are more likely to occupy precarious positions in the labour market. Additionally, Dilip was the only member of the group to place a geographical limitation on his job search.

Tomlinson (2007) defines students who proactively manage their access to employment as Careerists, a title which is particularly attributable to Beth and Rachel as they planned their entry to specific sectors from the second year of their degree. Reflecting upon their practice they consciously acquired multiple forms of recognised capital to position themselves advantageously. David can also be considered a Careerist, though, he had to modify his practice after struggling on placement, an indication that habitus is influenced by experience (Reay, 2004). While Dilip has been placed in this group as he was ambitious, his plans focused on money rather than the nature of the job and developing a career within a field. I would argue that Tomlinson's (2007) Ritualist student, who is ambivalent viewing work as a means to an end, is more applicable to Dilip.

All four respondents in this group fulfilled their original intentions of attending university. David, Dilip and Rachel adopted an economic view of a degree leading to employment while Beth combined an academic orientation with long-term career prospects. By entering graduate roles the three working-class students were fulfilling the aim of education leading to social mobility (Department for Education, 2017d) while Beth used her middle-class capital to maintain an advantaged position (Crossley, 2012). I will now examine the next group of students who have been classified as possessing a graduate disposition. During the final year of the degree these students were not as clear on their career plans as the ambitious group of respondents just discussed. However, when they were ready to engage they had a disposition which



matched the requirements of the particular field they targeted to enable them to secure work quickly.

#### 7.4 A Graduate Disposition

Bourdieu (1977 p72) defines habitus as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions” with agents embodying cultural norms based on their background experiences. Social structures are reproduced through habitus which develops “individuals with the dispositions needed to make them work” (Bourdieu, 1990b p67). My use of the term a graduate disposition therefore refers to students who exhibited attitudes and behaviours that were compatible with the graduate labour market allowing them to effectively use their capital holdings to transfer from the field of education to their chosen field of graduate-level work.

I have classified four students within this group. Again, all possessed different background characteristics indicating the complex subjective nature of real life (Reay, 2004). I will discuss Holly and Grace together as there are similarities in their approach while Rohema and Jake will be discussed separately as aspects of their background characteristics influenced their experiences.

##### 7.4.1 A Job within Two Weeks

Holly and Grace were White British females and though they were from different social backgrounds, with Holly being middle class and Grace working class, both held high levels of capital relevant to the graduate labour market. Capital can be developed through school, but it is embodied more effectively when reinforced at home (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) which reflects their experience. Grace had been Head Girl at school and had mentored younger pupils. Outside school she was a qualified Brownie leader and competed nationally in Free-Style Disco Dancing. At university she had been a course representative, a member of the Dance Society and had completed a short, compulsory placement organising events in a museum as part of her History degree. Grace commented:

Grace: “I’ve always been a busy person, I’ve always been one of these people who once I do something I don’t quit very often.”

Holly's main interest was sport, particularly netball, competing in the school team and then a local league throughout her time at university. Holly's parents were sports enthusiasts, coaching various local teams that Holly and her brothers played in. Holly also had recognised work experience from a twelve-month sandwich placement on her Business Management degree as well as part-time work in various hospitality roles. Holly and Grace's breadth of involvement supports Cole and Tibby's (2013) work, recognising that being involved in a range of extracurricular activities enhances employability as it widens skills and abilities.

In my study I asked students to self-identify their social class. Grace believed herself to be working class saying:

Grace: "we're not overly wealthy. I would say we are just normal, average."

However, I feel Grace presented herself to others as possessing a middle-class disposition as she was confident, articulate and had high capital holdings that she used to her advantage. Holly had experienced similar opportunities in her childhood, but in contrast she believed herself to be middle class commenting:

Holly: "My Mum and Dad are working class because they've worked hard through their life, but that's now made me middle class because of the lifestyle they've given me."

The education system confers legitimacy upon middle-class practice with student behaviours and involvement in activities matching teachers' expectations (Crossley, 2012). Both Grace and Holly progressed smoothly through their education with university being the expected next stage.

On entering their final year of university neither Holly nor Grace had a clear career plan. They had attended university as they wanted to continue their education for its own sake rather than directly linking it to a career (Lawson, 2012). They knew they did not want to continue studying at masters-level with Grace saying:

Grace: "I'm definitely looking for work".

From speaking to friends and family they had been advised that a graduate scheme might be their best option. Holly said:

Holly: "I've got quite a lot of people I can ask and everyone has turned round to me and said get a graduate scheme because once you've got one you're in."

Graduate schemes tend to open early in the recruitment cycle with some companies having deadlines before Christmas (Targetjobs, n.d.a). However, Grace did not start looking for jobs until Easter at which point she realised:

Grace: "some of them have already closed so I think I may have missed it. It confuses me where they start and where they end."

In contrast, Holly had a better understanding of the recruitment cycle and had applied to five schemes spending up to ten hours on each one, reading background information on the company to target her responses. Diagnosed with dyslexia at school Holly discussed her experience of the psychometric test stage saying:

Holly: "I sent off my dyslexia forms and got an extra 25% because they are all timed so that was good, but doing the test was awful, I just panicked, I really freaked out. I'd been doing a load of practice ones and I thought I was ready ... it didn't go well. I knew as soon as I finished like it's not happening."

Written aspects of the application process can be particularly challenging for students with dyslexia as they may misinterpret questions and struggle to present themselves coherently (Bryan, 2012). The psychometric tests were a difficult barrier to overcome so Holly decided to focus on her studies and look for work after graduation.

Holly wanted to work in London as her partner, who was also graduating, had already secured a job there. However, in the short-term she decided to return home saying:

Holly: “back home I had quite a big network of family and friends as searching for a job it can be quite ... upsetting at times or anger you at times, but at home that wasn't a problem as there were so many people around me.”

Holly's mother had attended university so was a source of both practical and emotional support. This backs up Raque-Bogdan et al.'s (2013) findings that female students are more likely to receive emotional support from their parents in relation to career decision making than males.

Gathering informational capital by exploring different careers online Holly decided she would like to work in market research as it sounded interesting. Advised by an agency to directly contact companies in London herself with a CV and cover letter Holly emailed five companies and immediately received an invitation to interview after which she was offered a position starting the following week. Describing the process as “so fast”, Holly's direct approach indicated her ability to exert her agency, mobilising her capital holdings by asking for and acting effectively upon advice (Devine & Savage, 2005).

Grace also drew on her family social capital for support (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2013). At her father's advice she had her CV checked by careers before speaking to her parents. She explained:

Grace: “I spoke to them about what I could do, the options that were there for me. They helped me to decide as I think it's daunting trying to work out what you want to do.”

Grace decided she would like to work in a sales environment. Again she drew upon her father's experience as a sales manager to understand the area of sales she would like to work in. Applying to several jobs online Grace was invited to interview for a sales role with a national transport company. Commenting on her experience she said:

Grace: “It was very quick, quite overwhelming. I had to do a questionnaire then I did an interview with a presentation and I found out on the same day that I'd been hired.”

Parallels can be drawn between Holly and Grace's situation and students within the "Fish out of Water" category. Until Easter of the final year they also lacked a clear career plan and were looking for work in a specific geographical area due to personal circumstances. They were open-minded in potential careers, but were motivated to look for graduate-level work with their main aim being to get a foot on the career ladder. Once they had gained access to a field, and did not feel under pressure due to having an income, they could work out their future career steps. When they were ready to fully engage in the search for work, Holly and Grace's approach to the job market differed with their habitus being replicated in their practice. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) posit that reflection is an important stage of understanding personal employability and Grace and Holly spent time understanding themselves before starting to apply. Grace said:

Grace: "I didn't know what I wanted to do so I worked out what sort of skills I'd gained from my degree and figured out sales was a good match."

Reflection leads to symbolic mastery and they had a clear understanding of their strengths from their high holdings of capital to search for fields that were compatible to their abilities. Clark et al. (2015) found the key to success is not only involvement in extracurricular activities, but being able to articulate the learning from them. Holly drew upon her experience saying:

Holly: "If asked a question I can always back it up with work experience and things from outside work. I've never struggled to be able to relate it to something I've actually done."

Holly and Grace's reflective practice and ensuing actions were instinctive indicating their practical mastery (Bourdieu, 1990a). They confidently handled the recruitment process, taking two weeks from application to being offered the post in their current organisation. Cultural capital can be embodied through dispositions which indicate an individual's habitus (Robbins, 2000). Holly and Grace both had high holdings of capital that they were able to symbolically use to present themselves as employable graduates with high-level skills and abilities that are desirable in the workplace.

I interviewed Holly and Grace twelve months after graduation and they had now identified career paths from their initial roles as they understood the sector better. While they were ambitious to progress their careers they also continued to lead an active life outside work. Grace was again dancing and helping at Brownies while Holly had joined a netball league which had helped her to make friends in a new city. Living with her partner Holly also envisaged a family in her long-term future once she had established her career.

Social capital affects habitus and family support from childhood, through involvement in activities and expectations, had influenced Holly and Grace's approach to the labour market. Holly summarised this saying:

Holly: "If you are surrounded by people that are motivated you are going to be motivated yourself. My Mum and Dad have always been motivated by work and this has influenced me."

Grace and Holly's transition from education to the workplace had been smooth as their disposition and practice were compatible to the expectations of the field. I will now discuss Rohema who struggled with the transition due to circumstances beyond her control.

#### 7.4.2 Fitting in to an Organisational Culture

Rohema's experience shares many similarities to Grace and Holly's. She had high holdings of cultural capital, but no clear career plan as she entered the final year. After not passing the psychometric test stage on two graduate scheme applications she similarly decided to wait and apply for work after completing her studies when she also secured work within two weeks. Being from a British Pakistani heritage led to some differences in her experiences which manifested themselves when she entered the workplace.

Rohema considered herself to be middle class based on her father's professional job as an accountant as well as feeling that her family was financially comfortable. Family was important to Rohema with her social network at home including extended family members. As a female she said she was expected to help at home commenting:

Rohema: “I can’t study at home because my grandma lives with us and she is dependent on me and my aunties are in my house three times a day so I have to cook for them, I have to make the teas and it’s too much.”

The intersection of Rohema’s gender, ethnicity and culture placed different expectations on her in comparison to Abdul in the previous chapter. As a male he did not have to contribute to domestic life at home with his mother undertaking all his cooking, cleaning and laundry to allow him to initially concentrate on his studies, and later, his job. In contrast, Rohema had to contribute to the running of the household to the detriment of her studies. Comparing Rohema and Abdul exemplifies how the expectation for academic achievement and employment does not take into account the everyday lives of individuals. Where individuals have additional responsibilities outside university and the workplace the impact of these should be taken into consideration when evaluating employment outcomes.

Rohema therefore decided to move away to university to focus on her studies which upset her mother. Born in Pakistan, Rohema described her mother as “traditional” and similarly to Nasreen and Ayesha, in the “Fish out of Water” category, and Abdul in “Between Two Worlds”, she would like Rohema to settle down and marry by her mid-twenties. Upon marriage Rohema would be expected to move to her husband’s family home so her mother wanted her to live at home for as long as possible. However, her father wanted Rohema to have a career, and widen her opportunities, so fully supported her move. Rohema said:

Rohema: “My dad’s very supportive. He just asked me where I was going to study. He’s always wanted to see me in a good job and said do what you want to do. My mum is the complete opposite. She is like stay at home so you can come home every day. I’m an only child and she misses me.”

As an only child she also had a close relationship with her father which her grandmother described as:

Rohema: “you are your dad’s son and you are your dad’s daughter.”

As a graduate himself Rohema's father had wanted her to continue to university to enjoy the experience as well as adopting the more usual view held by ethnic minority parents that a degree leads to employment success (Tomlinson, 1997). Being an only child appears to have influenced Rohema's experience in comparison to Nasreen and Ayesha's, as without any brothers her father placed higher career expectations upon her and additionally, he encouraged her move away from home to widen the field of opportunity. Rohema therefore felt her mother was her "biggest barrier" to a career by wanting her to stay close to home, but since her father did not mind where she lived she planned to look for work on a national basis.

Himestra et al. (2013) found that ethnic minority students CV's are often limited due to a lack of recognised cultural capital from extracurricular activities, but this was not the case for Rohema. She explained:

Rohema: "I was really active, I did a lot of volunteering. I was on the youth council and I had projects like organising residentials and hosting conferences. I also ran a computer club ... and I have organised fundraising events like fashion shows and charity galas."

Rather than taking a placement Rohema continued to work part-time in retail as she was confident that with her extracurricular activities, from home and university, she could demonstrate her abilities on job applications

Within education Rohema's cultural background does not appear to have significantly differentiated her experiences in comparison to Grace and Holly as they all lived at university, remained close to family, achieved academically and were involved in capital acquiring activities. Rohema was required to visit home more often though, fulfilling a gendered role within her family by helping her mother and grandmother which detracted from her study time. With an outgoing and confident disposition Rohema, similarly to Grace and Holly, secured work in two weeks as an account executive at a software company. However, on entering the workplace she felt there was a cultural mismatch between her doxa and that of the organisation which presented her with difficulties.

Doxa is "a set of fundamental beliefs" (Bourdieu, 2000 p16) that are linked to habitus and field (Deer, 2012). Rohema initially settled in to the organisation saying "I can't



sing its praises enough”, but after six months her progress stalled and she began to feel like an outsider in her team. The company had an organisational culture of staff socialising and drinking together after work in its onsite bar. Rohema felt uncomfortable attending the events commenting:

Rohema: “I’m at a disadvantage because I’m Muslim and I don’t drink. In the office there are four Asian staff and I’m the only Pakistani girl there. I’m not meant to be out late. The office has its own culture of being sociable, but for someone coming from a background that doesn’t drink you’re kind of lost there. You need to be part of the culture or you are not going any where”

Rohema experiences represent institutionalised racism where she felt there was a lack of understanding of her religious beliefs within the organisation that disadvantaged her in comparison to her colleagues (Shah et al., 2010). Furthermore, Garner and Selod (2015) posit that Muslim’s are particularly racialised and treated negatively in the workplace due to their religious practices. Not fitting in with the team meant she did not develop social capital within the organisation to progress. She said:

Rohema: “I feel the company is really unprofessional at times, it’s the ones who get drunk with the management who are getting on. I feel like I’ve lost control and I feel emotionally drained from it all.”

Zwysen and Longhi (2016) found that female graduates from a Pakistani background are one of the groups most likely to face an employment gap between their qualifications and the jobs they secure. Through her education and experience Rohema had developed her employability skills and presented a graduate disposition to be offered a degree-level role. However, in the workplace the intersection of her gender and ethnicity placed racialised structural constraints (Anthias & Mehta, 2003) upon her as not drinking meant work colleagues marginalised her rather than accommodating her beliefs. Her experience also supports Shah et al.’s (2010) research that the labour market is racialized with academically successful Muslim women finding it difficult to seek employment that they consider to be respectable and compatible with their habitus (Dwyer & Shah, 2009).

Feeling uncomfortable in an organisational culture that she could not change, Rohema decided she had no other choice, but to leave the company after six months. Rauf and Mitra (2016) found that in recent years the number of Muslim female entrepreneurs has risen as they try to provide themselves with a working environment that meets their cultural expectations and practice while simultaneously offering opportunities for career success. Rohema decided to follow this approach and set up her own events management business. Drawing on her cultural capital from her previous voluntary experience, social capital from her network of contacts from organising charity events and her father's economic capital to help with the set up costs, Rohema felt excited by her move. She believed it would allow her the opportunity to fulfil her career ambitions rather being restricted by an organisation that did not acknowledge diversity in cultural practice.

#### 7.4.3 Breaking Away from a Working Class Habitus

Jake, a White British male, revealed his social class to me in his opening comments saying:

Jake: "I come from a very working-class background. Neither of my parents had been to university and it really showed through my upbringing to be honest. I never really had plans to go to university or plans to go to college."

Brought up in an industrialised area in the North East of England, Jake's father was a manual labourer and his mother was a lunchtime school supervisor. Jake had not been interested in academic study at school so was unconcerned when he left with a handful of GCSE's at grade C and indicating the intersection of his class and gender he expected to enter a low-skilled manual job. His attitude resonates with Willis' (1977) findings that working-class children expect to enter working-class jobs demonstrating the enduring nature of a deeply inculcated habitus. His results were also indicative of the inequality in the education system where working-class pupils are more likely to underperform as their approach to study does not meet the classed expectations of teaching staff (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Goodman & Gregg, 2010). Jake started working in a local supermarket where his attitude quickly changed. He explained:

Jake: “After a month or so of just working solidly I thought (next part said in a quieter voice) I need to get myself out of this. It was like an out of body experience, a reality check more than anything else. When I started working I realised I hadn’t anything going on in my life at 16.”

Jake’s family, including extended members, were motorbike enthusiasts. Having helped with maintenance and repairs from childhood, Jake decided he wanted to study engineering and found his grades were sufficient to join a vocational college course. With low educational capital in his family Jake was encouraged to continue on to university by one of his tutors who Jake described as “brilliant” saying:

Jake: “He talked us through the whole process. Of course I was scared of having the whole loan thing and the fees and how am I going to be able to afford this and move away from home.”

As previously noted with other working-class students in my study many feel more comfortable speaking to tutors rather than careers advisors due to already forming a relationship with them (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). At university, after speaking to his peers who had already found the careers service helpful, Jake’s attitude changed. From visiting careers himself he decided to take a year out in industry commenting:

Jake: “The placement’s done me the world of good.”

Requiring engineering students, Jake’s placement was in a small local water filtration company where he moved around a number of departments to develop a range of skills and abilities. Jake found his final-year academic performance improved as he had a better understanding of engineering concepts (Brooks & Youngson, 2016). Additionally, it also provided him with relevant capital for the field.

Due to his family’s lack of economic capital it was necessary for Jake to secure work upon graduation. While earning money was important he also wanted a job that utilised his engineering skills. Upon entering his final year he therefore revisited careers for advice before applying for graduate schemes at leading car companies. He was rejected at the first stage mainly due to his Level 3 vocational qualification being equivalent to 64 UCAS points which was lower than the minimum entry criteria set by

a number of organisations. Understanding the value of social capital Jake had maintained contact with his placement organisation. Approaching the end of his course he learnt that they had a graduate job available so spoke to his former manager to express his interest and, after an interview, he was immediately offered the position. On his experience of applying for work Jake said:

Jake: "It really put things in perspective about how difficult it is to get out there and if I hadn't kept my ties with (placement company) then really I would be worried about where I'd end up."

Jake's experience of securing graduate work is an example of the complex relationship between structure and agency in contemporary society (Elliott, 2014). When leaving school Jake met the expectations of his working-class habitus by entering a low-skilled manual job (Mills, 2008). Habitus allows the space for individual agency though (Bourdieu, 1990a), and becoming aware of his dominated position through low-skilled work Jake broke from his expected trajectory by leaving work to return to education. His low UCAS points limited the universities he could apply for and also later represented a structural barrier in relation to graduate schemes. Jake worked within the boundaries presented by his structure of opportunity (Roberts, 2009) demonstrating his individual agency by acquiring cultural capital from a sandwich placement which later led to graduate employment. Through socialisation and new experiences at university (Reay, 2004) Jake's habitus changed. Looking back on his experiences Jake said:

Jake: "If I'd applied myself better I could have gone to 6<sup>th</sup> form and I would be a lot further on than I am at 24, but I think I've managed to get myself back on my feet from the position I've been in."

In our final interview a year after graduation, Jake reflected on how university had changed his life. He was pleased to have secured a graduate-role rather than a physical job like his father commenting:

Jake: "It's nice to be in a position where I don't harm myself. I don't have to come home every day and put ice on my shoulders because it's really tough."

Jake, proud of his working-class roots, was also conscious that university had changed his outlook on life. He explained:

Jake: “I’m going home in a few weeks to catch up with old friends who I haven’t seen in years and I am dreading seeing some of them. They are childhood friends and I want to see how they are doing, but I know one or two of them are going to be (pauses) oh you went off and you haven’t been home in ages. They are going to throw my career in my face, but so what? I didn’t want to stay in the crap job I had when I was 17 and go to the same pub every single night. I wanted something else and I’m proud of what I’ve done.”

Parallels can be drawn between Jake and Darren, from the “Between Two Worlds” category, in terms of their social background. Jake however made two different decisions which may account for him securing graduate-level work more quickly than Darren. Firstly, he moved away from home to live at university becoming immersed in the culture and the opportunities for extracurricular activities. He also sought professional careers advice in his second year which led to him securing a placement, and acquiring cultural capital, that was recognised in the graduate labour market. First generation university students can find it difficult to develop a career vision, though, seeking professional advice early in a degree helps with the process (Pasero, 2016).

Jake’s experience demonstrates the generative rather than deterministic nature of habitus (McNay, 2000). While he had broken away from his working-class origins to secure graduate-level work, Jake’ did have limitations placed upon his range of options due to his original low educational capital, indicating the duality of structural constructivism (Fowler, 1997). His actions were not the instinctive behaviour of the middle-class, but a consequence of conscious reflection demonstrating his symbolic mastery. From an unpromising future at 16 Jake had followed a path that was leaving his working-class habitus behind as he entered the field of graduate labour.

#### 7.4.4 Summary of Respondents with a Graduate Disposition

Vaara and Fay (2011) identify habitus as an internalised system of thoughts and perceptions that ultimately shape an individual's actions. A key factor in this group securing work was their disposition with their behaviour's matching employer's expectations for graduate-level work. As Holly and Rohema were from middle-class backgrounds, each with a parent who had attended university themselves, their disposition and career ambitions were developed from an early age due to socialisation in the home (Silva, 2015). Being first generation students from working-class backgrounds Grace and Jake's decision to attend university represented a break from their upbringing. While habitus is enduring, individuals have the potential to change from their original position through exposure to new experiences and opportunities (Nash, 1999). Grace had acquired high holdings of capital from a range of experiences during her childhood. This included educational capital through academic achievement which led to her desire to attend university from the age of 15. In comparison, Jake left school with weak GCSE's and entered low-skilled work from which he could have easily reproduced his "subjective expectations of objective probabilities" (Bourdieu, 1990b p59). Living in a disadvantaged working-class area the expected outcome for Jake would have been to remain in low-skilled manual work, but he decided to return to education to improve his long-term situation.

On entering their final year Grace, Holly and Rohema did not have clear career plans similarly to respondents in the "Fish out of Water" category. Studying a vocational engineering degree meant Jake had a better understanding of the field in relation to his qualifications. While the "Fish out of Water" students lacking a career plan decided to postpone engagement with the graduate labour market until they had identified a sector to enter, the students with a graduate disposition wanted to work immediately upon finishing their degree. All four had moved away from home to live at university, and while they could draw upon their family for emotional, and except Jake, financial support, they had a stronger sense of independence that they wanted to maintain.

Each member of this group possessed a background characteristic which could have led to structural disadvantage in the workplace (Okay-Somerville & Scholaris, 2017). For Holly this was only her gender whereas Grace and Rohema faced the double-bind of gender intersecting with their class and ethnicity respectively. While Holly and Grace

appear not to have faced disadvantage so far, for Rohema this manifested itself in her workplace experiences where her Muslim values left her feeling ostracised in a company with a culture of networking through after-work drinking. Her experiences support Evans and Bowlby's (2000) findings that Muslim Pakistani women face challenges in the workplace not only based on their gender, but also their ethnicity. Finally, as a White British working-class male, Jake's background represents the group in society least likely to attend university (Independent Commission on Fees, 2014). At university Jake's habitus began to change leaving him with a sense of moving away from his childhood friends as he entered the field of graduate labour.

None of the students in this group secured work until immediately after graduation indicating that long-term planning is not always necessary to secure employment. Due to their disposition they were able to draw upon their capital holdings to quickly exert their agency when they were ready to fully engage with the labour market. Completing their studies represented a time of crisis where all four reflected upon their situation (Noble & Watkins, 2003) to inform their actions. For Holly, Grace and Rohema this meant understanding their skills and abilities to target their applications as recommended in the CareerEDGE model of employability (Dacre Pool & Sewll, 2007). In contrast, Jake drew upon his social capital by returning to his placement organisation demonstrating the symbolic value of his previous experience. I will now analyse the final three students who were focusing on job satisfaction from their employment.

### 7.5 Job Satisfaction

I have categorised Emily, Philip and Warren together as they had originally chosen their creative arts degrees due to their love of the subject accompanied by an intention of securing satisfying work that allowed them to use their creative abilities. Studying Textile Design, Emily was female from a White British middle-class background. During her childhood she had participated in a number of creative extracurricular activities including dance, music and art as her mum did not want her "hanging around on the streets." Through transubstantiation Emily's mother changed her economic capital into cultural capital (Moore, 2012) to enhance Emily's academic and

employment opportunities within the field of creative arts. Emily explained that these activities had influenced her choice of degree saying:

Emily: "I got good grades at high school in all my academic stuff, but it just never really interested me. I didn't want to do something for the rest of my life that didn't interest me ... I wasn't sure between art and textiles, but in the end I chose textiles as it was a more solid career route."

Prior to university Emily had reflectively considered employment opportunities in the field of art supporting Davey's (2012) findings that middle-class students make their education decisions cognisant of the long-term impact. While she enjoyed art she believed work would be more limited in comparison to textiles saying "people always need clothes."

Warren and Philip were both males from White British working-class families. Their creative degrees, in Graphic Design and Music Technology respectively, were computer-based. Warren described how his older brother had introduced him to technology:

Warren: "My brother is seven years older than me and he's sort of always been more of a father figure as there is only my Mum at home. He introduced me to new things, he introduced me to technology. We shared a bedroom and he showed me about computers and gave me his old PC's. He was a big influence"

Philip's mother was also a single parent. Philip commented that there was little money in their household so he first accessed a computer at his grandparents' house saying:

Philip: "I'd mess around on their machine all day and this is what really got me into computers. I never had much money so I couldn't just go and buy a computer. I had to save up and buy all the parts one at a time until I eventually had enough parts to build this entire computer."

Enjoying using technology later influenced Warren and Philip's choice of degree. Additionally, Philip started music lessons at high school that, combined with his love of computers, led to him studying Music Technology which involved recording and



producing music rather than performing. Warren's interest in Graphic Design was also developed at high school as he explained:

Warren: "I knew I enjoyed doing graphics and I knew there was a vast field to explore, you can take it anywhere. I started noticing different types of graphic design and realised there would be a lot of work available so I planned on heading down that route at uni."

As well as studying for a creative degree the three respondents shared other similarities. Firstly, they were all 19 when they started university. Philip had taken a gap year to earn money as he did not have access to family economic capital. In contrast, Emily and Warren had both stayed at college for an extra year to complete an Art Foundation course. Emily said:

Emily: "I went on to do my Foundation Degree because a lot of universities require it. You do photography, graphics, art, textiles, different types of design work so you know which are your strong points and where you should be going with it. It also helps build up a good portfolio."

A second similarity was that they had all moved away from home to university. Living on campus allowed them to take advantage of additional learning opportunities to develop their capital holdings (BIS, 2017c). Warren commented:

Warren: "My mum kind of pushed me. I'm the only person in my family who's come to university and she didn't want me to miss out on anything."

Their third similarity was that they had taken a sandwich placement, the significance of which I will discuss in the next section.

#### 7.5.1 Sandwich Placements in the Field of Creative Arts

A year-long sandwich placement was offered as an option on their degrees with all three respondents believing it was beneficial to take one. Daniel and Daniel (2013) found placements in the creative arts industries form an important link in the transition from education to work as they allow students to set their creative abilities into an

industry context as well as developing a network of contacts. Emily secured her job through a contact from her placement tutor while Philip and Warren approached their organisations directly with a portfolio of work to demonstrate their abilities. Warren explained his reason for taking a placement:

Warren: “I wanted the experience of working in a design agency because I knew how much it would help me progress in my skills set. I’ve learnt an incredible amount of stuff in terms of the real design world and how you’ve got to do things differently and how you have to approach clients. It was a really good learning curve”

Working for small to medium-sized organisations their employers had been impressed with their work with all three accepting the offer of a permanent job to return to their placement company upon graduation. Nationally approximately a third of graduates return to organisations that they have previously worked for (High Fliers Research, 2018) as employers are already aware of their abilities in the workplace. In addition to gaining work experience, placements provide opportunities for networking as contacts are crucial for success in the creative industries (Lee, 2011). The value of social capital in their respective field was emphasised during their degree with tutors sharing advice on how to develop a personal network. Emily commented:

Emily: “You build up so much experience ... I now have contacts in so many different places where I could send my CV in the future for jobs.”

Bourdieu (1977) describes agents with a habitus that is homologous to a field as “fish in water” with their practice following the expected behaviours for success. On his placement Warren had been told:

Warren: “We really like you as a person, we really like your technical abilities. They wanted to keep me as much as I wanted to stay there.”

Capital is only valuable if it can be mobilised in relation to the field (Devine & Savage, 2005) with these three respondents successfully deploying theirs on placement to gain an advantage in the labour market. Due to being offered jobs before they started their final year meant they did not need to engage with the graduate labour market. They

commented that this made the final year “less stressful” (Warren) and allowed them “more time to study” (Emily), while Philip said:

Philip: “It’s been a good year as I know I’ve got a job to go to.”

Similarly to the other five working-class students classified as “The Game Players”, Philip and Warren used their university experience to improve their trajectory in life (Reay, 2004). Taking a placement was a crucial factor in their changing habitus and all three had followed advice from tutors to develop practical mastery in their chosen fields as each one had slightly different rules. For example, Warren was shown how to write a creative CV for Graphic Design while Emily used extended contacts from her tutors to speak to organisations. Through conscious reflection during their second year rather than the final year, Warren, Philip and Emily also exhibited symbolic mastery with an objective understanding of their respective fields and how to secure graduate employment.

#### 7.5.2 A Year on in the Field of Creative Arts

All three envisaged a long-term career in the creative industries. While they wanted to progress into positions of responsibility it was also important to continue practising their art. Philip wanted his own recording studio while Warren said:

Warren: “eventually I would like to set up on my own as a freelancer. Depending on how much work comes in you could grow as a little agency that would be cool.”

Contacting them a year after graduation Warren and Philip were continuing to work for their former placement organisation. I did not interview them as they were living away, but they said that their roles provided the job satisfaction they had hoped for. I did manage to speak to Emily and she had significantly changed her career plans. Commenting that she enjoyed her work she also said:

Emily: “It was a lot of sitting at a desk and paperwork rather than designing and being creative which is why I had done a course in art and design. It was just kind of convenient as I wanted a job straight out of uni and I wanted to move back down there because my partner lived in the area. It was good to get some experience in the industry, but I’ve applied to do a PGCE course as I want to become an art and textiles teacher.”

As already noted by Reay (2004 p433) habitus and agency are “the products of opportunities and constraints framing the individual’s earlier life experiences”, and Emily’s actions were an indication of her middle-class habitus. Having previously taught at her dancing school while at college, she combined these skills with her creative-based qualifications to switch fields when she became dissatisfied with her job.

### 7.5.3 Summary of Respondents Prioritising Job Satisfaction

Emily, Philip and Warren’s graduate outcomes were influenced by actions taken in their second year at university indicating the long-term nature of developing employability skills (Pegg et al., 2012). Kalfa and Taksa (2015) posit that employability skills are socially constructed and personalised through holdings of capital and an individual’s habitus in relation to their chosen field. Positions in a field are then determined by the volume and weight of relevant capital (Bourdieu, 1984). In addition to the general advice, and development of transferable employability skills, Bridgstock (2011) believes universities should offer creative arts students career management skills specific to their chosen industry. For Emily and Warren this was achieved through working with their subject tutors, while Philip researched independently. Through their education, and work experience, all three respondents had developed their artistic ability, and crucially for the creative arts industry, they had established a network of contacts to enhance their social capital (Lee, 2011). During their placements they had also developed their doxa to practice naturally, and successfully, within their chosen field (Deer, 2012) as indicated by being offered a permanent job upon graduation.

Tomlinson's (2017) Graduate Capital Model of Employability emphasises the importance of Identity Capital to develop a persona and workplace practices that meet the expectations of a specific field. Furthermore, Holt (2012) posits that an identity that is homologous to a field confers symbolic power. Through their vocational-oriented degrees Emily, Philip and Warren had formed a good understanding of themselves, and the social practice required for success making a seamless transition from education to employment (Jackson, 2013).

Identity is also a product of an individual's social and material circumstances (Gazley et al., 2014). Emily's middle-class upbringing had immersed her in cultural capital acquiring experiences to form a creative identity from childhood. Miller et al. (2013) recommend employability skills are developed from a young age to be sufficiently high-level to allow agility in the workplace. When working in textile design no longer met her expectations Emily demonstrated the transferable nature of her employability skills (Senior & Cubbidge, 2010) by changing field to train as a teacher. Comparing Emily with Christina in the "Between Two Worlds" group who was equally artistic, the intersection of Emily's gender and middle-class background provided her with the financial and emotional support to pursue a creative education for its own sake. In contrast, working-class Christina was encouraged to study Mental Health Nursing as it was more likely to lead to employment.

Philip and Warren's working-class background meant they were introduced to technology indirectly. Warren was gifted a second-hand computer by his older brother and Philip had access to a machine at his grandparent's house before saving to build his own. Initially developing their skills at home, they eventually acquired educational capital to support their abilities to enter their chosen field. While habitus is durable it is not eternal (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Warren and Philip were both working in roles that would be considered Technical Middle Class according to Savage et al. (2013) or lower professional occupations using the NS-SEC categories (ONS, 2010). Forming professional identities through their new careers could potentially dislocate Warren and Philip from their working-class origins (Lehman, 2014) as their family had little understanding of the demanding nature of the world they worked in. However, they were enjoying their work and had high expectations for their future.

Bridgstock (2011) considers the creative industries to be different to other graduate professions. While there are rules on how to engage and progress in the field these tend to be less structured with creative ability and social capital being key factors for success. Predominantly comprising small to medium-sized companies graduates in the field of creative art are more likely to develop protean careers (Wyszominski & Chang, 2017) requiring them to operate independently and with self-direction, potentially moving between organisations to achieve their career objectives (Hall, 1976). Undertaking a placement had helped Warren, Philip and Emily to develop their employability skills as well as a professional identity. Being offered work by their placement organisations meant they could focus on their studies during their final year as they had already engaged with the graduate labour market. Having discussed all eleven respondents in “The Game Players” category I will now draw together the barriers they faced.

#### 7.6 Barriers to Graduate Employment for Respondents Classified as “The Game Players”

All members of the group classified as “The Game Players” secured graduate-level work upon finishing their degree. However, this does not mean that they did not face barriers when looking for work. Barriers are obstacles, but in comparison to the other two conceptual groups “The Game Players” experienced fewer as indicated by the number of names next to each category in Table 7.2. Additionally, where a barrier was present they managed to surmount it to secure graduate employment.

Table 7.2 Summary of Barriers to Graduate Employment for Respondents Classified as “The Game Players”

	Barrier to Graduate Employment	Respondents Affected
1.	Limited career plans on entering the final year	Holly, Grace, Rohema, Dilip
2.	Lack of geographical mobility	Dilip, Holly
3.	No sustained involvement in extracurricular activities at university	Dilip
4.	Only low-skilled work experience	Dilip, Rohema,
5,	Lack of social capital	Dilip, Rohema
6.	No practical advice and guidance available from parents	Rachel, David, Dilip, Warren, Philip, Jake
7.	Low informational capital due to not engaging with professional advice (careers or tutors)	Dilip, Holly
8.	Low UCAS points	Dilip, Rohema, Jake,
9.	Gendered, cultural and religious expectations from family members	Dilip, Rohema,
10.	Barriers within the graduate recruitment process itself	Rohema, Holly, Jake, Dilip
11.	Time management to handle study and applications	Rohema, Holly, Dilip

Meeting the Conservative Government target of being employed within six months of graduation (BIS, 2016), the higher education system would consider “The Game Players” to be successful based on their measures. Bourdieu’s (1977) structural constructivist epistemology is still applicable to the group as objective structures presented limitations that meant some respondents had to change their plans upon

engaging with the graduate labour market. For example, Dilip, Holly, Rohema and Jake had originally hoped to secure a place on a graduate scheme, but when their applications were unsuccessful they focused on alternative roles.

Beth and Emily have not been noted in Table 7.2 as during the interviews they did not reveal any barriers that had prevented them accessing their chosen career. Beth had modified her plans from entering the legal field during her second year when she identified the heritage sector as a field she could access. Beth and Emily were White British, middle-class females and during their childhood they had been encouraged to acquire holdings of cultural capital that they used to their advantage in presenting themselves as employable graduates. Only one barrier was encountered by Rachel, David, Philip and Warren due to their working-class background. While their parents were supportive of their education and careers, they were unable to provide practical advice on graduate employment. However, this was overcome by seeking professional advice at university. In terms of barriers, Dilip faced the most, potentially supporting the evidence that ethnic minority students are disadvantaged, and face racism, when entering the workplace (Lessard-Philips et al., 2015; Zwysen & Longhi, 2016). Dilip believed that being from an Indian cultural heritage had led to him being highly motivated by money and he used this as his key driving force when searching for work. However, being prepared to move frequently, and experience precarious employment conditions through short-term contracts, allowed him to fulfil his aim of buying a rental property a year after graduating meaning he was successful using his own criteria. I will now conclude my analysis of “The Game Players” in the next section.

## 7.7 Chapter Summary

Habitus is the embodiment of cultural norms that are developed from childhood onwards. While habitus is durable it is not eternal (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) as it generates rather than determines practice with exposure to new experiences providing an opportunity for change (McNay, 2000). Habitus can be revealed through an individual's agency (Reay, 2004). While members of the group experienced constraints that impacted upon their actions, they also exerted their agency in the labour market to secure graduate-level employment. To successfully access the graduate labour market, though, it is not necessary to follow the long-term Careerist



approach as recommended by Tomlinson (2007). Deciding not to fully engage with the graduate labour market until they had completed their degree, Grace, Rohema and Holly all found jobs within two weeks demonstrating the power of possessing relevant capital (Tomlinson, 2017).

Adopting a praxeological approach allowed Bourdieu to overcome the subjective/objective dualism to analyse human agency and social processes (Peters, 2014). Rejecting structuralism, Bourdieu (1984) argued that individuals can use the capital at their disposal to strategically manoeuvre themselves into positions of power and dominance in a field. I have referred to this group of respondents as “The Game Players” due to their ability to negotiate entry into the graduate labour market using the capital at their disposal. All members of this group possessed at least one background characteristic, based on their class, gender or ethnicity which Moreau and Leathwood (2006) identified as potentially impacting upon employment outcomes. However, through symbolic mastery they subjectively understood their expectations in relation to the field and, where necessary, adapted their practice to enter the objective labour market in a graduate role. Roberts (2009) posited that it can be difficult for young people to understand the opportunities available to them and members of the group did face constraints which resulted in them making compromises in their decisions. Overall though, they were able to construct themselves as employable graduates (Holmes, 2015) and exhibit their agency by entering the labour market.

A key difference separating “The Game Players” from the other two groups within my study is their level of work experience. Helyer and Lee (2014) found that completing work experience as part of a degree increases employability. Placements also provide a structured approach to gaining capital relevant to a field leading to a habitus that is homologous and a sense of being a “fish in water” (Clark & Zukas, 2013). With the exception of Dilip and Rohema, all respondents in this group completed a work placement and, in line with High Fliers Research (2018), five returned to their placement organisation upon graduation. Following McLuney et al.’s (2018) research on ethnic minority students, Dilip was in a more precarious position due to his job being on a short-term contract. In contrast to Ayesha and Nasreen who had taken short-term contracts due to a lack of available work, Dilip’s decision was purposeful as the lack of job security increased his pay to meet his prime motivation of earning a high salary.

Rohema was also in a vulnerable position due to a cultural mismatch between her practice and that of the organisation (Anthias & Mehta, 2003) with her eventually feeling forced to leave the job due to it not meeting her values as a female Muslim (Dwyer & Shah, 2009).

An individual's trajectory in social space is influenced by the volume and composition of their capital holdings (Bourdieu, 1984). Holly, Beth, Emily and Rohema's middle-class background had led to the acquisition of cultural capital from a young age which they used to support their transition into the workplace. At this stage in their life Beth and Emily's gender does not appear to have impacted upon their career decisions. However, following Canetto et al.'s (2012) findings, Holly was incorporating her partner's career plans in to her own. As he was already employed she decided to search for work in the same location and, therefore, geographically constrained her options. The intersection of Rohema's gender and ethnicity placed additional limitations on her search for work. As noted previously, her Muslim Pakistani background presented a particular challenge (Evans & Bowlby, 2000) as upon entering the workplace the organisation's culture was incompatible with her personal values.

With the remaining seven students being working class, their ability to secure graduate-level work exhibits the non-deterministic nature of habitus. As working-class students McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) identified that they were more likely to face structural disadvantage with Rachel and Grace encountering further disadvantage to their employability from their gender and Dilip from his ethnicity (Okay-Somerville & Scholaris, 2017). They had viewed university as a life-changing experience, keen to acquire new knowledge, and particularly for Rachel, David and Dilip who adopted an economic approach to their education, improve their employment opportunities. A year after graduation Rachel and Jake felt graduate employment was already changing their social position. Lehmann (2014) warns that changing habitus can be difficult as individuals question the values of their upbringing. While Rachel embraced her new lifestyle, Jake found the move away from his childhood experiences more challenging.

In terms of employment the higher education system considers "The Game Players" to be successful due to them securing graduate-level jobs within six months of completing their studies (BIS, 2016). An ability to secure graduate-level work is a

reflection of the group's employability and agency in relation to the graduate labour market (Senior & Cubbidge, 2010). However, their transition from education to employment was not necessarily smooth with challenge and compromise along the way that were a reflection of their class, gender and ethnicity. Additionally, a year later Rohema and Emily were unhappy with their roles, feeling their habitus was not compatible to the organisations so they used their capital to change field. In summary, respondents classified as "The Game Players" had strategically used their capital holdings to enter the field of graduate labour; however, their behaviours reflected the subjective nature of habitus with personal circumstances influencing their experiences. The next chapter will draw together my data analysis by providing a conclusion to my thesis.

## Chapter Eight – Conclusions and Recommendations

### 8.1 Introduction

This final chapter draws together the evidence from my literature review and data analysis to fulfil my aim of critically exploring the influences of class, gender and ethnicity upon student engagement with the graduate labour market and their early career experiences. I have used Bourdieu's (1977) work on field, capital and habitus to frame my research and discussed these terms in my literature review to conceptualise inequality in the fields of higher education and employment. My literature review then continued to discuss employability as it is a strategic priority for the university sector. I then provided an account of my methodology before presenting my data analysis within three chapters based on the level of student engagement and outcomes in relation to the graduate labour market. In this chapter I will summarise key issues, and present my recommendations, as well as considering my contribution to knowledge, the limitations of my study and areas for future research.

My main research question to fulfil my aim was:

- How do the personal background factors of class, gender and ethnicity influence student engagement with graduate employment opportunities during their final year of study and the year following graduation?

My conclusions are structured using the following sub-questions and the influence of class, gender and ethnicity will be discussed in each one.

- What activities did respondents undertake in relation to securing employment?
- What holdings of capital did the respondents possess in relation to the graduate labour market?
- What aspirations did respondents have for their future?
- What barriers did respondents face when accessing the graduate labour market?

Firstly, I will discuss the meeting of the field of higher education and the graduate labour market in relation to my study.

## 8.2 The Meeting of Fields

The level of activity undertaken by respondents in this study, and the subsequent employment outcomes, indicates the complex and individual nature of the transition from the field of higher education to the many different fields comprising the graduate labour market (Samuel et al., 2013). Activity varied from no engagement at all to highly-reflexive strategic behaviour, from the second year of university onwards, to target a specific field. The expectation that graduates secure employment, or are in further study, six months after finishing their degree (BIS, 2011) offers a narrow marketised approach to higher education (Mok & Nelson, 2013) that does not reflect students' personal reasons for attending university and their individual plans upon graduation. Lawson (2012) advocates a wider view be taken with higher education being a positive learning experience in its own right.

Expansion in the higher education sector has been encouraged by adopting an economic perspective believing higher-level qualifications will lead to improved employment opportunities and therefore, social mobility (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2015). The expansion in the field of higher education has not been met by an equal expansion in the field of graduate labour leading to a competitive market where nearly half do not secure a professional-level role (Department for Education, 2017e). While universities have a role to play in developing students' employability (McCowan, 2015), focusing on success in terms of employment outcomes can cause graduates to feel disappointed at the end of their degree (Porter, 2014), and means the academic and personal achievements of obtaining a degree are not always recognised. However, all respondents in my study had found attending university a positive experience (McArthur, 2011), and were proud to be awarded a degree. The first key point I would like to note is that success should therefore not solely focus on employment outcomes particularly as the Department for Education (2017e) acknowledges it can take time to negotiate the transition from education to employment.

Within my data analysis I have used behaviours in relation to the labour market to structure my three findings chapters with each one containing a mix of working and middle class, male and female respondents from different ethnic backgrounds as represented in the sample. However, sub-groups within each chapter indicate

differences in behaviour through the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity (McBride et al., 2015). For example, White British middle-class students behaved quite differently to the British Pakistani middle-class students in the “Fish out of Water” group as the cultural background of the latter placed expectations upon them in terms of marriage and family rather than employment.

Bourdieu (1977) saw habitus as a durable system of dispositions believing it generated rather than determined practice (Burke, 2016; McNay, 2000), particularly when individuals are exposed to new experiences. Habitus holds structure and agency in tension (Reay, 2004) allowing the study of an individual’s trajectory. Habitus is also a linking mechanism between capital holdings in relation to the field, and while an individual is likely to achieve their “subjective expectations of objective probabilities”, (Bourdieu, 1990b p59) they also have the capacity to be unpredictable and exert their agency to change their position in life (Bourdieu, 1990a). Findings from my data analysis indicate the complex and messy reality of life (Reay, 2004). Respondents in my study exhibited a full range of behaviours and outcomes with some being more predictable in relation to the literature and others demonstrating that attending university had allowed them to overcome barriers and exert their agency in relation to the graduate labour market. For example, working-class students in the “Between Two Worlds” group reproduced their dominated social position when they were unsuccessful in securing a graduate job (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In contrast, the working-class students in “The Game Players” used experiences available at university, such as work placements and extracurricular activities, to strategically acquire cultural capital to access graduate jobs (Tomlinson, 2017).

The field of higher education is stratified (Bathmaker, 2015) with each university possessing its own institutional habitus which affects practice (Byrom & Lightfoot, 2012). Setting my study in a post-1992 university in the North of England with a positive reputation for widening participation meant respondents in my study were from a wide range of backgrounds that for some meant structural disadvantage (Roberts, 2009). A further factor that Pasero (2016) found had an impact on engagement with the graduate labour market was being first-generation students which, except for three middle-class female students, was the case for my respondents. I will now discuss the influence of class, gender and ethnicity on engagement with the graduate labour market.

### 8.3 Activities Undertaken in Relation to Securing Employment

All the middle-class respondents within my study had followed Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) expected educational trajectory by progressing straight from college to university. Research by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014b) and HEFCE (2015) indicates that as middle-class students they should have maintained this advantaged position by being more likely to secure a high-level job in comparison to their working-class peers. However, in my study middle-class students were over-represented in the "Fish out of Water" group adopting a Retreatist approach (Tomlinson, 2007) by not engaging with the graduate labour market. A lack of career plan left four White British middle-class students with no clear direction (Shariff (2011). Like Burke's (2016) *Entitled Middle Class* they expected a satisfying job, but as they had a limited understanding of employment opportunities relevant to their degree (Lane, 2013) they were disconnected from the field and felt unable to apply.

The remaining middle-class respondents in the "Fish out of Water" group were female, and further influenced by the intersection of their gender and ethnicity as their British Pakistani families expected them as women to marry rather than pursuing a career. Alexander and Wezel (2011) found education has led to Muslim females challenging traditional practice, and after graduation both decided they wanted to work rather than not use their degree so they started considering their options at this point.

The four working-class students within the "Fish out of Water" group also exhibited behaviours that were influenced by its intersection with their gender and ethnicity. For two White British working-class females prioritising their male partners work requirements before looking for jobs themselves indicates the perpetuation of masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2000). In contrast, two working-class males followed Greenbank and Hepworth's (2008) findings by focusing on their degree to obtain high grades. A poor performance at A-level, which contradicted Jackson's (2012) findings for Chinese heritage students, left one adopting a compensatory approach in hoping to achieve high degree results. While a performance exceeding expectation for White British working-class males (Crawford & Greaves, 2015) led to an academic high achiever working hard to obtain a scholarship to be able to afford continuing studying at masters.

From the “Fish out of Water” students interviewed twelve months after graduation none were in permanent graduate employment. For the middle-class, Burke (2017) posits this represents inverted symbolic violence as they have not met the expectations placed upon them. Due to a lack of engagement with professional support services they did not understand how to approach the field, but like the middle-class students in Laughland-Booy et al.’s (2015) study, access to economic capital had allowed them to protract their search for work. The only working-class student interviewed was a male from a British Chinese heritage who remained unemployed indicating the continuing penalty experienced by ethnic minority graduates in the labour market (Department for Work & Pensions, 2015).

The remaining respondents within my study all engaged with the labour market, though outcomes differed significantly. Both working and middle-class respondents in “Between Two Worlds” struggled to articulate specific career plans. After evaluating their skills in relation to their chosen field the two middle-class students in the group felt unable to apply for jobs by deeming themselves to be “Not Yet Ready for Work”. They therefore used their middle-class habitus, and access to economic capital, to review their options with their family (Davey, 2012) to acquire additional experience before trying to secure a graduate job.

The rest of the students in “Between Two Worlds” were working-class so a lack of economic capital meant working was important for their financial survival. The group was dominated by female students who, similarly to O’Leary’s (2017) findings, lacked confidence in their employability. After being rejected from graduate-level jobs they applied for positions that did not require a degree. Wilton (2011) similarly found female graduates were more likely to occupy lower-level roles. Confidence was an issue for females across all three sub-groups indicating the far-reaching implications it has upon employment outcomes. For the two mature students in the group accommodating childcare within their career plans placed additional limitations on their search for work (Canetto et al., 2012). However, a graduate role was less important for the mature students as meeting their children’s needs was still their main priority. In comparison, the younger students with no family ties felt they had not yet achieved their employment expectations (Vina, 2016) and planned to re-engage with the field once they had gained more experience.



The outcomes of the working-class students in “Between Two Worlds” represents symbolic violence that perpetuates inequality (Bourdieu, 1977). Most had attended university with the specific aim of securing a higher-level job, but like Burke’s (2016) Static Working Class they were in non-graduate roles as they had been unable to negotiate entry to the field due to complex recruitment processes that are an invisible form of domination. While organisations do recruit on individual ability, middle-class applicants are more likely to possess the capital and disposition to successfully meet the entry criteria (Brown et al., 2004).

In contrast, the working-class students within “The Game Players” indicate how higher education can lead to social mobility by being able to exert their individual agency. Laughland-Booy’s et al. (2015) found working-class students were more reflexive than middle-class ones due to the financial need to secure work. Within my study reflection extended to the middle-class students in “The Game Players” as they also exhibited symbolic mastery by understanding the field they wished to enter and their ability to succeed. The group’s behaviours can be likened to the Strategic Middle Class and the Strategic Working Class in Burke’s (2016) work. In comparison to respondents in “Between Two Worlds” this group made fewer applications and secured higher-level jobs following Targetjobs (n.d.a) recommendation of submitting applications tailored to the job role. Burke and Hannaford Simpson (2019) believe that social capital is crucial to securing graduate-level jobs. To help strategically position themselves “The Game Players” had the highest rate of using university support networks including the careers service, the placement unit and tutors’ advice and contacts, the latter being particularly important for the creative arts students due to the nature of the industry (Lee, 2011). Success in the recruitment process was not necessarily immediate with adjustments to practice being made from their own personal experience or following advice from people within their social network.

The main difference in experiences for “The Game Players” was based on ethnicity which only became apparent twelve months after graduation when the two ethnic minority students in the group had changed their jobs. For the British Indian male he had consciously placed himself in a more precarious position for a higher salary. However, the British Pakistani female had experienced deeply embedded racialisation in the workplace (McCluney et al., 2018) as the organisational culture was

incompatible with her personal values forcing her to seek alternative employment. In comparison, the White British graduates had settled into the workplace and any changes in role were based on their own career progression decisions.

To conclude, the findings from my study indicate that the relationship between habitus and field (Maton, 2012) is not deterministic as outcomes varied significantly across the three groups. This is in line with Burke's (2016) study which found that while the Strategic Middle Class and the Static Working Class followed the expectations of their background the remaining graduates did not. The Converted Working Class and Strategic Working Class secured graduate-level work while the Entitled Middle Class failed to meet their high expectations resulting in lower skilled work. It must be recognised that students have the right to decide when they are personally ready to engage with the graduate labour market. However, with the growth in the field of higher education over the last fifty years, placing responsibility for employability upon individuals (Tomlinson, 2012) does not sufficiently support all students in their transition to the field of work. Differences in experiences and outcomes were influenced through the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity. However, the complexity of behaviours demonstrated in this thesis means universities need to review their services to provide a more individualised person-based approach (Su, 2014) to ensure all students are able to access the support they require. I will now discuss holdings of capital in relation to the graduate labour market.

### 8.3.1 Holdings of Capital in Relation to the Graduate Labour Market

Capital has to be strategically deployed, and symbolically recognised, in a field to provide its holder with advantage (Moore, 2012) with a number of forms of capital being important in the field of graduate labour. Educational capital, through holding a degree, was achieved by all respondents, but as Tomlinson (2008) points out in a competitive job market a degree is not enough. Therefore other capital holdings, become more significant.

Following Crossley's (2012) work, the middle-class students in my study had seamlessly passed through the education system viewing university as an automatic final step. From the literature I had expected them to maintain their advantaged position in the graduate labour market through higher holdings of capital (Bourdieu,

1984). However, two-thirds of my middle-class respondents struggled to identify a sector they would like to enter indicating that career decision-making is a crucial element in developing employability (Bridgstock, 2009) and accessing the field. Holding economic capital meant they had not reached a point of crisis (Mouzelis, 2007) forcing them to take action. They delayed their transition into the graduate labour market through travelling, temporary work and further study while they considered their next steps. In comparison, a lack of economic capital amongst working-class students meant they had to look for work irrespective of the level of job secured.

A key finding relating to the acquisition of capital, regardless of class, gender and ethnicity, was influenced by where students chose to live while at university. Those living on campus immersed themselves into university life (BIS, 2014c) acquiring cultural and social capital through involvement in a range of extracurricular activities that enhanced their employability (Clark et al., 2015). A number of the students living on campus worked part-time to support themselves financially; however, the working-class students tended to work longer hours which impacted on the extent of their involvement in extracurricular activities (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). For the middle-class students choosing to live at home this had been at the expense of acquiring cultural capital as they had not been involved long-term in societies, placements or other extracurricular activities while at university. This is a contradistinction to Tomlinson's (2008) and Stuart et al.'s (2011) findings that middle-class students enhanced their employability through involvement in wider opportunities at university.

A further key finding that cut across class, gender and ethnicity in terms of "The Game Players" securing higher-level jobs in comparison to the other two groups was that they held cultural capital, particularly relevant work experience, which was institutionally recognised in the graduate labour market (Robbins, 2000). The graduate labour market comprises multiple fields each with their own rules for access and progression (Tholen, 2015). Work experience, in combination with academic study, therefore helps students to gain an understanding of the field (Helyer & Lee, 2014) to strategically position themselves (Naidoo, 2004). Additionally, through reflection "The Game Players" exhibited better levels of symbolic mastery meaning their actions were planned to realise their intended outcomes.

Differences in how the group acquired work experience were observed by ethnicity. Jackson and Wilton (2017) believe employability is enhanced through longer-term career planning. The White British students in my study adopted this approach by completing work experience as part of their degree so in effect starting their search for graduate employment in their second year of university. Their placement allowed them to immerse themselves in the field to gain a deeper understanding of its rules. In comparison, the two ethnic minority students relied on their part-time jobs, though, they did recognise their capital gains from the experience (Gbadamosi et al., 2015) in constructing their employability (Dace Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Gaining work experience as part of their degree also led to the development of other forms of capital. Cultural capital was further enhanced as respondents understood the recruitment process (Brown et al., 2003) as well as the behaviours required in their chosen field. Valuable social capital was developed too as building a network of contacts in the field is important for success (Burke & Hannaford-Simpson, 2019). Contacts can provide advice, and in some cases, access to jobs since five graduates followed High Fliers (2018) findings by returning to their placement organisation.

In relation to the graduate labour market “The Game Players” were able to accumulate all five forms of capital identified by Tomlinson (2017); human, social, cultural, identity and psychological. In addition, following Dacre Pool and Sewell’s (2007) model of employability they were reflective to become self- confident and aware of their personal value in relation to the field. Respondents in the “Fish out of Water” and “Between Two Worlds” groups had also acquired capital through their time at university. However, employability is a relational concept so being able to enter a field depends on the capital holdings of others operating at the same time with Devine and Savage (2005) positing that to be successful possession of capital must be accompanied by an ability to mobilise it to personal advantage. While the “Fish out of Water” respondents had decided to delay their search for employment, those in “Between Two Worlds” found it challenging to exert their agency to achieve their desired outcomes.

To conclude, the key factors influencing the acquisition of capital particularly impacted on employment outcomes. These were moving away from home to live on campus while attending university and completing a period of work experience in conjunction

with a degree. White British students, regardless of gender and class, were more likely to meet these two criteria with working-class students using the experience to break away from their background to improve their opportunities in life (Reay, 2004). I will now discuss the future aspirations of respondents.

### 8.3.2 Future Aspirations

In the interviews when asked about their hopes and aspirations for the future some participants articulated this only in terms of their careers, while others extended their replies to their personal lives as well. While all had achieved their aspiration for academic success there were differences in employment outcomes with some being unable to secure a job while others accessed graduate schemes at leading international organisations. Through their familial habitus, Irwin and Elley (2013) posit that middle-class students have higher aspirations while working-class students tend to be more modest (Sellar & Gale, 2011). From my data, middle-class students did hold high career aspirations, but so too did the working-class respondents who had specifically associated attending university with securing a high-level job. For both working and middle-class students these hopes were only achieved upon graduation by “The Game Players” due to their strategic approach to the labour market.

Gale and Parker (2015) posit that aspirations are culturally informed, and class intersected with ethnicity as well as gender in my research to influence aspirations. Respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds had specific career and personal expectations placed upon them by their families. Muslim respondents, regardless of gender, were expected to marry by their mid-twenties. For males this meant securing high-paying employment (Levant et al., 2018) to support a family while females, if they wished to work, their priority was respectable employment (Dwyer & Shah, 2009). The other two ethnic minority students were males from a British Indian and British Chinese heritage and they similarly expressed high aspirations based on family expectations. In comparison, White British students, regardless of class and gender, had the freedom to choose their own careers. However, middle-class students were more likely to discuss their plans with their parents whereas working-class, and particularly males, had a sense of pride in wanting to secure work on their own (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008).

Being able to envisage a future career also impacted upon aspirations and behaviours in respondents search for work. For those in the “Fish out of Water” and “Between Two Worlds” groups their struggle to specifically identify the field they wished to enter meant their career aspirations were set in broader terms, and for those interviewed twelve months after graduation only one had secured a graduate-level job indicating the long-term nature of career planning (Artess, 2019). Through reflection “The Game Players” had identified the field they wished to enter beginning to construct a pre-professional identity while at university which Jackson (2016) believes enhances employability. Holmes (2015) similarly found developing a graduate identity is important to complete the transition from education to employment while Holt (2012) believes an identity which is compatible to the field confers symbolic power. By identifying a field they wished to enter “The Game Players” understood the rules for access and progression allowing them to plan their career trajectory (Bourdieu, 1984),

When discussing future hopes for their personal lives my findings demonstrated gendered aspirations. Irrespective of class and ethnicity, female respondents without children frequently referred to having a family in the future and were already considering careers that would allow them to combine home and work (Lyonette, 2015) continuing the normalisation of masculine power relations (McNay, 2000). One highly ambitious working-class female employed in the male dominated IT industry (ONS, 2017a) was beginning to follow Powell et al.’s (2009) findings by reconstructing her identity into more masculine terms to fit with her working environment. Children were therefore seen as a negative in terms of career progression. When comparing male responses their gender intersected with ethnicity as only ethnic minority participants referred to future families in specific terms indicating a cultural influence to their approach.

To conclude, aspirations were shaped more by gender and ethnicity than social class at the point of graduation. Respondents who were able to specifically articulate their ambitions found it easier to identify, and subsequently enter, their chosen field. Having discussed future aspirations I will now discuss my final research sub-question in relation to barriers faced in relation to the graduate labour market.

### 8.3.3 Barriers Faced when Accessing the Graduate Labour Market

The differing employment outcomes within my study support Hill et al.'s (2015) belief that the UK labour market is unequal. The range of employment outcomes also aligns with Bourdieu's epistemological position of structural constructivism (Fowler, 1997) as demonstrated by the subjective experiences my respondents faced when they engaged with the objective structure represented by the field of graduate labour. Within each of my discussion chapters I have provided a summary table of the barriers applicable to each group. Overall, the three groups broadly faced similar barriers, though, the number of people each one applied to lessened as the level of engagement increased. Therefore, the number of respondents in "The Game Players" affected by each barrier was lower in comparison to the other two groups.

Analysing barriers also reveals the complex and subjective relationship between structure and agency (Elliott, 2014). For example, two White British middle-class females in "The Game Players" did not appear to experience any barriers to achieving their desired outcomes. In contrast, a British Indian working-class male in the same group faced every barrier in the table. While the barriers impacted upon his actions and decision-making he did overcome them to secure a graduate job indicating that social and cultural background factors are not deterministic. However, those from disadvantaged backgrounds can find it more challenging to enter the workplace (Furling, 2013a), and not all respondents in my study were able to exert their agency to achieve their desired employment outcomes leaving some with a sense of failure.

Within their framework McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) differentiate between internal and external factors that can act as barriers towards employability. This also applied to my findings as barriers such as a lack of geographical mobility or gendered and cultural expectations related to internal individual circumstances. Whereas barriers, such as low UCAS points and the requirements of the graduate recruitment process, were externally imposed by the field. The graduate recruitment process itself was a barrier with many respondents, including those in "The Game Players", struggling to understand and negotiate organisations' requirements. The psychometric test stage proved particularly difficult with a number who had hoped to join a graduate scheme being unable to pass this stage. Strand (2003) found no difference in performance on psychometric tests based on gender, but in contrast in my findings it was only female

students who were unable to overcome this barrier. Professional careers advice did help students to strategically approach the field, but access to the graduate labour market was influenced by holdings of capital as discussed in Section 8.3.1. For students with lower holdings of capital, careers advise a stepped process to accessing the field (Pasero, 2016) such as taking a short-term contract first to gain experience as these are less competitive.

The barriers respondents faced supports Bourdieu's (1996) belief that those in dominant positions in a structured field create rules to control access and progression. In a competitive job market increasingly sophisticated recruitment processes, such as online tests and video interviews, are used as a filter mechanism for the high volume of applications (Branine, 2008). Jacobs (2018) posits that organisations potentially overlook good candidates due to the complex recruitment process rejecting applicants for a poor performance on a single measure. This sentiment was echoed by a number of students who felt they would be able to fulfil the requirements of the role, but were unable to demonstrate their ability in the impersonal early stages of the recruitment process.

Respondents believed that organisations were equal opportunities employers, recruiting the best candidates regardless of class, gender and ethnicity. Bauder (2005) argues that disadvantage occurs for ethnic minority students before they apply to organisations as a lack of informational capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) on the field of graduate labour acts as a barrier. Martinez-Roca et al. (2015) similarly suggest students from a working-class background require more careers support to overcome a lack of family knowledge. Within my findings there was no conclusive pattern of accessing careers advice based on class and ethnicity. There was however, a higher rate of usage of the careers service by female respondents further supporting O'Leary's (2017) work on women being less confident when entering the labour market.

To conclude, respondents faced a wide range of both internal and external barriers that impacted upon them being able to achieve their desired outcomes on an individual basis. Their actions and outcomes indicate the subjective nature of the relationship between structure and agency (Bourdieu, 1977). The current approach to employability within the sector is that a wide range of employability services and



employability enhancing opportunities are provided, but overall employability is the responsibility of individual students (Williams et al., 2015). The models of employability do not accommodate personal background factors that can act as barriers to students entering the graduate labour market. My findings indicate that students need more tailored individual support that forms part of their studies in order for them to make informed decisions and achieve their desired outcomes upon graduation.

#### 8.3.4 The Differing Experiences of Middle-class Students

Within my literature review, research by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), Reay et al. (2005) and Vaara and Fay (2011) all indicate that, through their holdings of capital, middle-class students experience a privileged position during their upbringing as their behaviours match the expectations of the education system. As a consequence, Crawford and Greaves (2015) found that middle-class students are more likely to continue their education and attend university straight from college which was the case for all of my middle-class respondents. Not only did their families expect them to continue, but their colleges also held this expectation and provided good information on UCAS and how to access university, but little on alternative options after college. Snee and Devine (2014) posit that friends also impact upon decision making. The middle-class students in my study were influenced by the fact that the majority of their friends were attending university and they felt they should follow this route as they did not want to “miss out” on the experience.

The pattern of privilege is also reproduced upon entering the labour market with the middle class continuing to maintain an advantaged position in society (Brown et al., 2014). From this I therefore expected the majority of middle-class students in my study to secure graduate-level employment and be over-represented in “The Game Players” category. My findings reveal the diversity of experience within a social class though as only four middle-class students out of a total of twelve were in this group. In line with Burke’s (2016) Strategic Middle Class, these four engaged effectively with employment opportunities to transition from education into the graduate labour market. In my study, middle-class students were actually over-represented in the “Fish out of Water” group and did not engage with the graduate labour market during their final year, and were still struggling to secure employment a year later. Access to economic capital meant they could take their time in deciding upon their next steps after

university. However, the main barrier faced by these middle-class respondents was a lack of career plan which, accompanied by a lack of understanding of how the field of graduate labour operated and limited cultural capital on their CV's to demonstrate their employability, left these middle-class students struggling to exert their agency similar to Burke's (2016) *Entitled Middle Class*.

In a competitive graduate labour market (CBI, 2014), it cannot be assumed that middle-class students are able to draw upon the privilege from their upbringing and negotiate a smooth transition from education to employment. Parents play a key role in supporting their children as they progress through their education and into employment (Kenny & Medvide, 2013) with Davey (2012) finding middle-class parents using their resources, particularly social and informational capital, to maintain an advantaged position for their children. Pasero's (2016) findings however, that first generation students, regardless of their class, are less likely to be in graduate roles appears to also be an influencing factor in my research as only three middle-class students had parents who had attended university themselves. In line with Pasero (2016), first generation middle-class students in my study were unable to draw upon family advice and experience, or access friends and family-based social networks, to help them understand opportunities within the graduate labour market. To overcome the lack of family informational capital, the two first generation middle-class students in "The Game Players" used the university careers service, and accessed social capital through their university tutors, to gain relevant work experience, that directly led to employment upon graduation. It is therefore important to note that middle-class students also require support from university services as they too face barriers to graduate employment that they are unable to overcome simply due to their privileged position in society. I will now discuss my recommendations which are based upon the findings from my study.

## 8.4 Recommendations

The aim of this research was to explore the influences of class, gender and ethnicity on engagement with the graduate labour market. The following recommendations are therefore based upon my findings. While they are specific to the institution that my study was based upon they are relevant to the higher education sector when context is taken into consideration.

### 8.4.1 Provision of Careers Guidance before Entering University

Haynes et al. (2013) believe students make key educational decisions at a young age when there is little careers advice available and employment is so far in the future it is difficult to identify potential jobs. From my findings it was clear that students received good advice on the process of applying to university through UCAS, but actual careers support to set their studies into a longer-term context was limited, and frequently non-existent. A number of respondents, particularly those who did not secure a graduate job, struggled to identify a field of work they would like to enter upon graduation due to the lack of a career plan.

My first recommendation is that better careers support and guidance is available at school and college so that students can make informed educational choices. Information would allow them to be aware of potential careers that could be accessed through different qualifications as well as the type of work involved with each role. Information should help open up study options as they become aware of the wide range of courses and careers available rather than being viewed from a narrow, mechanistic perspective of linking jobs to specific degrees.

Parental support can assist in career decision-making (Ginevra et al. 2015), but only if they are well-informed (Adegoke, 2014). Furthermore, career decision-making is socially situated (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) with a good understanding of self in relation to job roles being essential to align personal development at university to future employment (Jackson, 2013). For students from disadvantaged backgrounds family informational capital is likely to be limited which adds to the challenge of understanding and negotiating entry to the labour market (Roberts, 2009). The provision of careers advice from a younger age would help students, and particularly

those who have limited support from home, to identify potential careers at an earlier stage rather than struggling at the end of the degree.

#### 8.4.2 Review of University Support Systems relating to Employment

From the publication of the Robbins (1963) report the field of higher education has experienced continual growth with current participation rates approaching the 50% threshold to be classed as universal. This growth has been encouraged by the government to develop a highly skilled workforce and to improve social mobility (Department for Education, 2017d). However, the expansion means the graduate labour market is increasingly competitive (CBI, 2014) which is particularly challenging for first-generation students with no family history of attending university.

My second recommendation therefore is to review university support systems available to students when completing their studies and transitioning into the workplace. Support systems could include, though are not limited to, the careers service, placement unit, personal tutors, peer mentoring as well as employability provision through the curriculum. The current view that being employable is the responsibility of the individual (Williams et al., 2015) overlooks the impact of inequality in society and the continuing transmission of intergenerational disadvantage (Furlong, 2013a). Due to the increase in student numbers universities have expanded their support systems, however, a fundamental review should consider how effective these are in relation to the student demographic at each institution, as my findings indicate that each student adopts an individual approach to engaging with the graduate labour market that is influenced by their class, gender and ethnicity. For example, in “The Game Players”, a group who all strategically engaged with the field of graduate labour, some students visited careers in the second year and formed a long-term personalised plan while others waited until after they had finished their studies to start looking for work demonstrating the need for a person-based approach to employability (Su, 2014). The first stage of the review should therefore be to understand the needs of the student body then return to first principles in developing an integrated system of support across the curriculum and central services.

#### 8.4.3 Provision of Work-based Learning

A key factor differentiating “The Game Players” from the other two groups was that they had completed structured work experience as part of their degree. Brooks and Youngson (2016) found a twelve-month placement had a significant impact upon securing graduate-level employment while Helyer and Lee (2014) posit that learning in the workplace improves employability. Work experience helps develop cultural capital through the skills and ability to complete a job as well as social capital from a network of contacts. It would also assist students lacking a career plan to appreciate different roles available in the workplace.

My third recommendation is that universities increase the provision of work-based learning within the curriculum. A broad approach should be taken to include company visits, completing academic work in conjunction with industry and guest speakers as well as work placements for up to a period of twelve months. Placements tend to already be included in vocational degrees (Ewertson et al., 2017), however, provision should also be extended so all students have access to a period of work experience to enhance employability skills and gain an understanding of the field of graduate labour.

#### 8.4.4 Provision of Extracurricular Activities

Universities provide a range of extracurricular activities that can also enhance a student’s employability (Clark et al., 2015), however, participation rates are low amongst commuter students living at home (BIS, 2014c). Additionally, Stuart et al. (2015) found working-class and ethnic minority students are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities. My findings indicate low levels of involvement in extracurricular activities amongst the “Fish out of Water” and “Between Two Worlds” groups.

My final recommendation is that, in conjunction with the Student’s Union, universities review the provision of extracurricular activities. Being involved in extracurricular activities can help develop cultural and social capital that is valuable to employers. The review should include the type of activity available, and also the timing of the activity, as commuter students are less likely to return outside teaching hours. Universities have a key role to play in assisting students to develop their employability

and a multi-faceted approach that includes extracurricular as well as curricular activities is essential (Cole & Tibby, 2013).

### 8.5 Contribution to Knowledge

Research in relation to entering the graduate labour market has already been undertaken on social class (Abrahams, 2017, Bathmaker et al., 2013, Burke, 2016), gender (Wilton, 2011) and ethnicity (Connor et al., 2004; Zwysen & Longhi, 2016). Using Nicholson, LaPlaca, Al-Abdin, Breese and Khan's (2018) framework on identifying the contribution a particular study makes to existing knowledge, my thesis adopts an incremental approach as it adds to the existing body of work. By simultaneously researching class, gender and ethnicity, through the lens of habitus, the contribution to knowledge proposed by this research relates to the role of intersectionality in relation to analysing the transition from education to graduate employment. Intersectionality, as discussed in Chapter Two, captures a multi-dimensional experience of life (Crenshaw, 1989) which Phoenix and Pattynama (2006) believe allows a deeper and more integrated analysis of activities. Crenshaw (1989) developed the concept of intersectionality as she felt that examining a single axis did not capture the experiences of everyone within the group. For example, solely analysing women would not address the differences in experience of Black women in comparison to White women.

My discussion presented the real life experiences of students as they negotiate the transition from education to the graduate labour market. The sub-groups in my findings indicate the need to adopt an intersectional approach to analysis as behaviours in relation to the graduate labour market could not have been captured on a single axis as engagement differed depending upon an individual's personal circumstances in combination with their specific class, gender and ethnicity. As a single study set in a post-1992 institution, my research has provided a detailed discussion of contextualised data that serves as a reminder that each student is an individual with their own personal circumstances that has an impact upon their experiences.

## 8.6 Areas for Further Research

My findings indicate that students adopt a range of attitudes and approaches to their transition from university to the field of graduate labour which are influenced by the intersection of their class, gender and ethnicity. My study could therefore, be deepened by focusing on a particular combination of the background factors to provide a better understanding of the influence of each one. For example, White British working-class males or British Pakistani middle-class females. Equally so, an intra-group approach could be taken such as comparing working class to middle-class White British females.

The original plan for my thesis also provides an opportunity for further research. I had intended to compare Business Management students at two contrasting institutions; ideally, the post-1992 institution that my research has been set in and a Russell Group university. Due to difficulties in recruiting participants at another institution I had to reconsider my research object resulting in interviewing students across a range of academic disciplines within the same institution. The potential to conduct a comparative study across institutions therefore remains to investigate the contention that the higher education sector is stratified with inequality in outcomes based on class, gender and ethnicity.

With the introduction of the TEF (Department for Education, 2017b) employability and employment outcomes continue to be a prominent feature of the discourse in the field of higher education. As with any new policy initiative it is important to evaluate its impact. Research could therefore be undertaken to review universities' responses to the employability requirement in the TEF and its effect upon graduate outcomes.

## 8.7 Concluding Comments

The aim of this thesis was to critically explore the influences of class, gender and ethnicity upon student engagement with the graduate labour market and their early career experiences. Through interviewing thirty-one participants my findings indicate that the transition from the field of higher education to one of the many sectors that comprises the field of graduate employment presents a journey that some negotiate smoothly while others struggle. The findings of my study represent the complexity of real life (Reay, 2004) with respondents presenting an intricate pattern of behaviours in

relation to the graduate labour market that are influenced by the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity. In a mass education system the subjective needs of individual students are difficult to meet. While there is a range of opportunities for development and support systems available, there is also an over-reliance on students taking the initiative to access them on an individual basis (Pasero, 2016).

Inequality in education based on class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), gender (OECD, 2015b) and ethnicity (Holck, 2016) is well-documented in the literature, and it is an inequality that continues into the labour market (Dorling, 2015; Wood, 2008; Zuccotti, 2015). My findings indicate the continuation of these inequalities amongst my respondents in students from the “Fish out of Water”, and particularly the “Between Two Worlds” groups. However, “The Game Players”, who all possessed at least one background characteristic which would be considered by Moreau and Leathwood (2006) to be a disadvantage, also demonstrate that employment outcomes after university are not deterministic. Bourdieu(1990a) believed habitus can be generated through exposure to new experiences. The student participants in this research have shown how they used their time at university to develop an identity and dispositions that allowed them to access the graduate labour market.

Attending university presents a life-changing experience from both a personal development perspective (McArthur, 2011) as well as opening up employment opportunities. I would like to finish with a quote from the participant Adele, from the “Between Two Worlds” group, to demonstrate the power of education and its ability to change people’s lives. Adele was a mature student who left school with two CSE’s and returned to education after a twenty-year break.

Adele:            “I never thought I’d get a degree. My family have noticed a change in me ... I challenge things now rather than taking them at face value. I would still be working, but now I’ve got lots of opportunities.”



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## **Appendix A: Reflexive Account of My Personal Background**

Attending university in the 1980s I am myself a product of widening participation and did not appreciate until many years later the profound impact that gaining a degree had upon me as an individual as well as the career opportunities it provided. Coming from an upper working-class background, where my mother was a nurse and my father a skilled toolmaker in a local factory, I was the first person in my family to attend university. Even though I negotiated the system, it now feels like much of what I achieved was through a few fortunate opportunities that I seized without realising their significance at the time.

I have always enjoyed studying and attending university seemed the natural next step as I had a thirst for knowledge. At 18 I did not consider the long-term job opportunities that university would offer, I simply wanted to continue my education. After visiting a number of universities across the country, I finally chose to stay close to home and commute every day to a university in the next city. Money was a limiting factor, but more importantly I was not ready to leave home at this stage.

My firm choice was for Business Studies, but on A-level results day my grades were a few points short of my offer so I did not gain my place. Later that afternoon I was contacted by an admissions tutor for another course at the same institution and I accepted a place on a related, but little known degree. The degree was excellent in terms of content and delivery, and I probably would not be where I am today if it was not for the support and opportunities provided through the course.

During my childhood I had begun to acquire holdings of cultural capital including playing the clarinet and being a member of Venture Scouts. I extended these holdings further while at university by joining two societies. The main opportunity that increased my employability was completing two compulsory six month placements which were secured with help from the course team. My first placement was in the offices of a relatively local engineering company, while my second placement was in a nearby city working as a credit controller for a large, multi-national document company. Both of these organisations provided valuable work experience that I could later draw on when applying for jobs.



During my final year at university I also engaged with ordinary reflection that indicated a level of symbolic mastery. As part of the course I attended a series of structured sessions run by the university careers service. From these few weeks I learnt how to evaluate myself, how to search for job roles and how to complete the application forms. Prior to these sessions I had no idea how the graduate job market operated. After the compulsory careers sessions I consciously sought further professional advice and attended employer presentations, mock interviews and assessment centres to gain a level of practical mastery before my first interviews with employers. I was conscious that without this additional advice I would not have known how to present myself to best effect at interview and fulfil my ambitions of the high-level job that I felt I was capable of given my qualifications.

Having met and visited people from around the UK while on my degree, I was also now prepared to move away from home and work anywhere in the country which opened up my job opportunities. I attended a number of assessment centres, the final stage for a graduate job, and by February in my final year I had two offers for graduate schemes in the finance sector. I needed to work to earn money, but I was also ambitious and wanted a career to achieve in the workplace. I was one of the first to secure a job on my course as I had been proactive by applying for schemes as soon as they became available. However, without the careers sessions I do not know how I would have approached the process. Upon graduation I started working as a trainee manager on the graduate scheme for one of the major high street banks. With a good salary and a promising future for career progression I felt I had made it.

I now realise that I had faced a number of structural barriers in gaining graduate employment, but I had been able to exert my agency to overcome them. The main barrier was that I was the first member of my family to attend university. My parents were extremely supportive throughout my education, helping financially and emotionally when times were hard. I could ask them for advice, but they had no experience of the world I had entered. In the late 1980's the graduate job market was less intense than the present day as there were fewer graduates in comparison to the number of roles available, but it was still a competitive process where you had to demonstrate your abilities. Therefore, by accessing professional careers support, and learning the rules of the game, I had been able to successfully use my academic qualifications to gain higher-level employment and improve my occupational position.

Another structural barrier was my limited knowledge of graduate-level jobs and I quickly realised I did not like banking as the industry and role did not meet my expectations. I therefore returned to my previous university for a careers appointment as I wanted further guidance on other employment opportunities. After two years I left the organisation and returned to university to take a Post-graduate Certificate in Education and start my career as a lecturer.

Completing my PhD has led me to reflect upon my personal trajectory and my habitus. I was always academically inclined, but with no family experience of university I could easily have been expected to find work after leaving school. However, when I expressed a wish to continue studying both my parents were pleased and keen for me to do so. Aspects of my every day practice did change while at university such as meeting people from a wider range of backgrounds and attending events through university societies. I also experienced higher-level conversations and debates with my tutors that made me aware of the complexity of society. From my time at university I would now consider myself to be middle class in terms of my occupation, but also through the people that I mix with socially and professionally. With my family I regularly engage in cultural activities such as museum visits, the theatre and eating out, and we are fortunate to have travelled extensively to experience diverse cultures. I do not believe I have a cleft habitus as I am close to my parents and they have now also engaged with new experiences.

Attending university has impacted profoundly on my life both academically and occupationally. I believe that now through my current role as a tutor I have a part to play in supporting students to achieve their original purpose of attending university. I am conscious that student paths after graduation vary significantly and include securing graduate-level work immediately, continuing in a current job, further study, taking time out to travel or registering as unemployed

As part of my research I needed to reflect upon my own position and question my beliefs of what constituted a good graduate job. The graduate schemes offered by the large organisations are generally perceived as the best since they are the most competitive, and must therefore be considered desirable, as well as offering a structured training scheme, good financial rewards and long-term promotion prospects within the organisation. I had joined such a scheme upon graduation, but had left within

two years as I disliked the banking industry and felt it did not offer me job satisfaction. Therefore I had to question why I thought graduate schemes were the best outcome on finishing university when I had left one myself. Upon reflection my beliefs were based on the competitive nature of these schemes thinking recruits must be the best of each year's cohort to succeed in the process. Therefore, my first challenge was to accept that there is a wide range of employment outcomes after university and not everyone wants to apply for a graduate scheme. This also led me to question the purpose of attending university and I realised with the pressure of government employment statistics I had begun to view a degree as a means to gaining a good job. My reason for attending university had been to continue my education and gain more knowledge. Within my research I therefore needed to recognise that students attend university for a wide variety of reasons and also have a range of personal plans and ambitions for the next stage in their life after completing their degree.

Reflecting upon my personal trajectory, and changed position in social space, has helped me to understand my own values and beliefs. I value hard work, both in education and the workplace, and I also believe that it is possible for an individual to alter their trajectory in life. However, I also concur with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) position that inequality is reproduced unless agents actively reflect and match their behaviours to be compatible with a particular field. The graduate labour market has changed significantly since the 1980's, and while my actions were sufficient for the time, students need to be aware of the current context when making decisions. Through my PhD I hope to gain an insight into students understanding of the graduate recruitment process and their personal hopes and ambitions in order to better support those I work with in taking their next steps upon graduation.

## **Appendix B: Interview Guide**

### **Personal background and upbringing**

- Experiences as a child at home, involvement in activities
- Experiences at school and college
- Typical weekend, school day

### **Ambitions**

- Childhood – for study and work, changes in ambitions
- Influence on final year job search
- Future
- Influences on ambitions

### **Family support, influences and expectations**

- Parents and siblings
- Other influential people
- On study, employment, personal development

### **Graduate employment**

- Current plans and activities
- Type of role, aspirations for development
- Knowledge of the process
- Job search, advice sought
- Expectations of the job search process

### **Personal factors**

- Location, family, motivation (factors as well as pay)
- Expectations from graduate employment
- Pressure to find job/ time to choose

Relevant experiences to offer an employer

- Work experience
- Extracurricular
- Volunteering
- Differentiating yourself as an individual

What class would you place yourself in?

How would you classify your ethnic origins?

## **Appendix C: Information Sheet**

### **A Critical Exploration of the Influences of Class, Gender and Ethnicity on Student Engagement with Graduate Employment Opportunities.**

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#### **INFORMATION SHEET**

You are being invited to take part in this study exploring final year undergraduates' attitudes and approaches to finding work upon completing their studies. Before you decide to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me if you wish. Please do not hesitate to ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the study about?**

Attending university is a significant investment in both time and money; the purpose of this research is to understand how current students approach job searching upon completing their degree as obtaining high-level work is one of the expected outcomes of study. From this, strategies can be developed to support students as they graduate.

#### **Why I have been approached?**

You have been asked to participate because you are currently a final year student approaching the end of your studies. To be included in this research you need to have attended school in the UK.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is your decision whether or not you take part. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form, and you will be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your studies and grades upon completing your degree.

#### **What will I need to do?**

If you agree to take part in the research you will be asked to complete three interviews over a period of one year. The first interview will be at the start of the academic year, the second during term two and the final interview will be completed within six months of graduation. Each interview should last no longer than one hour and they will be recorded for later use.

**Will my identity be disclosed?**

All information disclosed within the interview will be kept confidential; your name and any identifiable material will be removed. If criminal activity is revealed in the interview legal obligations would necessitate disclosure by the researchers to appropriate personnel.

**What will happen to the information?**

All information collected from you during this research will be kept secure and any identifying material, such as names will be removed in order to ensure anonymity. It is anticipated that the research may, at some point, be published in a journal or report. However, should this happen, your anonymity will be ensured, although it may be necessary to use your words in the presentation of the findings and your permission for this is included in the consent form.

**Who can I contact for further information?**

If you require any further information about the research, please contact me on:

Name: Ruth Brooks

E-mail: [r.brooks@hud.ac.uk](mailto:r.brooks@hud.ac.uk)

Telephone: 01484 473958

## Appendix D: Consent Form

### **A Critical Exploration of the Influences of Class, Gender and Ethnicity on Student Engagement with Graduate Employment Opportunities.**

It is important that you read, understand and sign the consent form. Your contribution to this research is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged in any way to participate. If you require any further details please contact the researcher.

I have been fully informed of the nature and aims of this research ☐

I consent to taking part in the research ☐

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research until six months after the final interview without giving any reason ☐

I give permission for my words to be quoted (by use of pseudonym) ☐

I understand that the information collected will be kept in secure conditions for a period of five years at the University of Huddersfield ☐

I understand that no person other than the researcher/s and facilitator/s will have access to the information provided ☐

I understand that my identity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym in the report and that no written information that could lead to me being identified will be included in any report ☐

If you are satisfied that you understand the information and are happy to take part in this project please put a tick in the box aligned to each sentence and print and sign below.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Researcher:

Print:

Print:

Date:

Date:

(one copy to be retained by Participant/ one copy to be retained by Researcher)



## Appendix E: Risk Analysis and Management

ACTIVITY: Interviews for PhD thesis			Name: Ruth Brooks	
LOCATION: The Business School			Date: April 2013	Review Date: Annually
Hazard(s) Identified	Details of Risk(s)	People at Risk	Risk management measures	Other comments
Interviewing students on an individual basis	Personal safety	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews will be held where possible during office hours in a staff room so that other colleagues are in the vicinity. The departmental secretary for Leadership and Management will be aware that these interviews are being held.</li> </ul>	The departmental secretary can prevent the interviews being interrupted, but will also be aware of when they are running from a safety perspective.
Loss/ theft of data	Security of data	Interviewees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electronic data to be stored only on password secured computer equipment and storage devices.</li> <li>Digital audio recordings to be transported in a lockable case.</li> <li>All paper documents to be stored in a locked cupboard in a staffroom that can only be accessed by the researcher.</li> </ul>	Laptops, and other electronic data storage devices to be transported in the boot of a car.
Travel to interviews at participating university	Accident during travel	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher's car and associated documentation is</li> </ul>	Researcher is approved for travel by The Business School.

			<p>registered according to the university finance policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews held off campus will be logged by the departmental secretary for Leadership and Management in the Business School so that the university is aware of my location.</li> <li>I will be in contact with a family member so that they are aware of my arrival and departure from interview location.</li> </ul>	<p>It is expected that I will have to sign in as being present at the organisation according to their security procedures.</p>
Display screen equipment	Poor posture sat working for prolonged periods resulting in musculoskeletal problems, visual/physical fatigue	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All workstations subject to DSE assessment process</li> </ul>	
Manual handling	Personal wellbeing	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To move and carry equipment with consideration of personal health and well-being.</li> </ul>	

## Appendix F: Summary of Interviewees Background Information

		Gender	Ethnicity	Class	Subject Studied	Interview Start Academic Year 2013	Interview End Academic Year 2014	Interview February – May 2015
1	Darren	Male	White British	Working	Business Management	√	√	√
2	Rachel	Female	White British	Working	Business Management	√	√	√
3	Rohema	Female	British Pakistani	Middle	Business Management	√	√	√
4	Nasreen	Female	British Pakistani	Middle	Business Management	√	√	√
5	David	Male	White British	Working	Business Management	√	√	√
6	Holly	Female	White British	Middle	Business Management	√	√	√
7	Charlotte	Female	White British	Working	Business Management	√	√	√
8	James	Male	British Chinese	Working	Business Management	√	√	√

9	Abdul	Male	British Bangladeshi	Working	Business Management	√	√	√
10	Mark	Male	White British	Middle	Business Management	√	√	√
11	Jessica	Female	White British	Working	Business Management	√	√	√
12	Dilip	Male	British Indian	Working	Business Management	√	√	√
13	Sam	Male	White British	Working	History		√	
14	Grace	Female	White British	Working	History		√	√
15	Beth	Female	White British	Middle	History		√	
16	Emily	Female	White British	Middle	Textile Design		√	√
17	Philip	Male	White British	Working	Music Technology		√	
18	Ayesha	Female	British Pakistani	Middle	Youth and Community Studies		√	√

19	Jake	Male	White British	Working	Automotive Design and Technology		√	√
20	Warren	Male	White British	Working	Graphic Design		√	
21	Lydia	Female	White British	Working	Fashion and Textile Management		√	
22	Louise	Female	White British	Middle	Photography		√	√
23	Jane	Female	White British	Middle	Drama		√	
24	Adele	Female	White British	Working	Health and Community Studies		√	√
25	Chloe	Female	White British	Middle	Sociology		√	
26	Dana	Female	White European	Middle	Architecture		√	
27	Heather	Female	White British	Working	Sociology		√	
28	Anna	Female	White British	Working	Sociology		√	√
29	Brett	Male	White British	Middle	Sociology		√	

30	Christina	Female	White British	Working	Mental Health Nursing		√	
31	Sally	Female	White British	Working	Sociology		√	

## Appendix G Initial Interview Summary

Thematic Code		Comment <a href="#">Interviewee 1 Interview 1</a>
Personal Circumstances		<p>Age at first interview 21</p> <p>White Male Working Class</p> <p>Lives at home</p> <p>BTEC National Certificate Business– DD Degree – Business Management 2.1</p> <p>Works at a local newsagents as a junior manager</p>
Involvement in activities	p2	<p>Played football regularly until 19 when broke arm <b>taught me a lot about the qualities in life such as leadership and teamwork ... a lot of my core qualities come from there to be honest</b></p> <p>Teaches commitment</p>
Education	p3	<p>Did not follow friends after school chose a city centre college where he knew no one <b>I chose Leeds to get to know new people ... I fancied a bit of a change ... a fresh start</b></p> <p>Friends all going to the college in another nearby major town <b>there must be a time when that has to stop and you've got to go your own way</b></p> <p>Found it hard meeting new people, how to approach them, helped him to be a better person now</p> <p><b>Start afresh, be the person that I wanted to be not the person they were looking at and thinking oh this has happened to him back home.</b></p> <p>Broaden his horizons – home area old-fashioned, people are born there and live there all their life. People <b>have a job and then they go out at a weekend and that's all they do and that's not what I want.</b></p>

Ambitions	p4	Chose to study business as it is very broad, leadership qualities from football nurtured him into management. <b>Leadership and being in charge of my own destiny has brought me to this course where I am today.</b>
	P5	Nobody in family with a degree, but <b>I knew it was a good thing.</b> Didn't plan to take a degree when started college, but was curious about degrees, knew they were a good thing and the job market was also a factor.  Feels uncertain about the future. Learning and meeting new people stands him in good stead to get a graduate job. Didn't get a placement which was a confidence knock – felt this was due to poor time management.
Family Support	p1	Unsettled family background – moved around until age 8 then back to home town to be near family. Dad not present then died when 17. Looked on uncle as fatherly figure.
	P8	Does not mention mother at all, but refers to caring responsibilities and being part of a young carer's network. Network ended age 14 which is a time of big decisions with GCSE's. <b>More responsibility at home than most people.</b>  Older sister finishing university training to be a nurse- in own house. Younger sister left school 16 admin job – still lives at home.  Older sister guaranteed a job from NHS, a different system so support has to come from uni. Got to seek for himself rather than talk to friends.
	P9	Uncle has had a big effect on life – father figure in the absence of own father.  Acted like a fatherly figure to younger sister
Other support	P1	Supported by young carer's network until age 14
Employment Plans	p5-6	Like to get into a big company where there's room for progression. <b>Loyal person so can offer that to a company and a chance for progression builds up mutual respect,</b>  <b>Graduate trainee would be ideal, rather than going in as an assistant manager to a small business.</b>



		This interview October so had only finished applying for placements the previous month. Need to manage the process better and keep applying rather than companies waiting to get back to him. Reality of process different to his expectations as waiting to hear back from people and he didn't.
Graduate Employment Process	p6       P7	<p>Little knowledge of the process. Probably spend some time in the library with the careers people, possibly attend some sessions with the LDG (not a relevant service – they offer academic skills support), attend graduate job fairs to gain an insight into what employers are looking for.</p> <p>It's going to be the biggest thing for me, but it's something that I'm looking forward to</p> <p>I think it is going to be a tough process</p> <p>It's going to be a long drawn out process which is probably why I need to start applying as soon as possible</p> <p>Worried about the time it is going to take – enjoys a social life too much. Work-life balance important</p>
Friends	P8	<p>Friends from home not gone to university so don't understand how to juggle study, home and work.</p> <p>Friend from home went to uni, but failed second year and dropped out.</p> <p>One good friend at uni who is currently on placement – isolated in the final year.</p> <p>There's nobody around where I live that's doing a similar thing to what I have so when I go home I'm kind of on my own with it.</p>
Personal hopes/ values	P9	<p>It will shape my family life in future, family life will be a lot better.</p> <p>How important education is something I can pass on to future generations.</p> <p>Everything that is worth having in life is something you've got to work hard at I believe</p> <p>Personal self-belief, self-motivation has come from bad experiences in the past</p>
Expectations from graduate job	P10	<p>Will have to start at the bottom</p> <p>Self-fulfilment from being promoted within a company rather than jumping from job to job.</p>

		<p>Leadership</p> <p>Being in charge of your own decisions and being responsible.</p> <p>I'm not motivated by money, I'm motivated more intrinsically.</p> <p>Prepared to move away, <b>the further the better</b>. Then says within reason maybe an hour or too. Not sure if suited to living in London. National schemes will require you to move.</p> <p><b>A graduate leaves university with a will to continue learning ... wants to progress and see the bigger picture.</b> Contrasts this to non-graduates who are happy with where they are at.</p> <p>Would like a job in place for when the degree finishes. This interview is October so early in the graduate cycle.</p>
Relevant Experience	<p>P10</p> <p>P11</p> <p>P12</p>	<p><b>I've got a degree, but I haven't got the work experience to back it up.</b></p> <p>Can offer an employer self-drive, motivation, desire to keep learning, willing to start at the bottom and move up, loyalty.</p> <p>Some work experience from working in a local newsagents – just 6 employees.</p> <p>Has considered volunteering possibly in a bank on a Saturday morning to make up the shortfall of work experience. Challenge of time with everything else as well.</p>
Class	P13	<p><b>Probably lower class at the moment, I think I've got a middle-class mentality though</b></p> <p><b>I live on a council estate and my family are not career orientated. When I leave university I want to leave that notion of work and going to the pub at the weekend, I want to leave that behind. I think that's more of a middle-class mentality than a lower class. I think this thing about progression is inside me which is going to drive me on further.</b></p> <p>Wants to move on from home area, he belongs there because that's where he's grown up, but it's not what he wants for himself going forward.</p>
Gender	P13	Male

Ethnicity	P13	White British
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## Appendix H: Sample of Interview Summary

### Interviewee 1 Darren

In his first interview Darren self-identified himself as working class. He lived at home while at university and has continued to do so since graduating. Home is on a council estate and members of his extended family, including grandparents, uncle and older sister who are particularly mentioned in the interviews, live nearby. He currently lives with his mum and younger sister. He does not discuss his mum at all during the interviews, but does refer to being part of a young carer's network during his early teens. He says he had "more responsibility at home than most people", but does not enter into any more detail. His father left home when he was a young child and later died when he was 17.

Darren describes his home area as old-fashioned with people being born and living there for their entire life. While he feels a closeness to the area, mainly due to family connections, he says during his first interview that he wants to break from there and broaden his horizons. He purposively chose to study for his BTEC qualifications in the nearby city rather than following his friends to the local college. He made this decision to "get to know new people ... I fancied a bit of a change ... a fresh start." He wants to leave behind the notion of working five days a week and going to the pub at the weekend.

From his background Darren is considered to be a widening participation student. Going to university was a conscious decision that he made while at college. He felt a degree was a "good thing" and it would improve his job opportunities. However, a year after graduation Darren is still applying for graduate jobs, but due to a lack of economic capital, he is actually working two part-time jobs in conjunction with each other. He has continued to work 18 hours a week in a newsagents, the part-time job he held while at university, as well as working 25 hours a week in a warehouse. He believes he still has "unfulfilled potential" and continues to apply for graduate-level jobs on a regular basis. Darren describes himself as a confident and positive person and feels it is just a matter of time until he secures a job, stating that he will get there eventually.

At the start of the final year of his undergraduate degree Darren planned to apply for the larger graduate schemes as he felt they would offer him room for progression. He is not motivated by money instead preferring a role that provides self-fulfilment. He would like a job that offers him a variety of tasks where he can work hands on to make a difference to the people he works with. Darren is not entirely sure of job roles or the industry he would like to work in. This uncertainty means Darren is searching more widely across the field and his applications could potentially lack focus towards the requirements of a particular role.

During the interviews, Darren discusses his experiences of the graduate recruitment process. At the beginning of his final year of study, Darren had little knowledge of the process, but he thought it was going to be tough. He had failed to secure a placement for his third year which had knocked his confidence, though he did acknowledge this

was his own fault due to poor time management. He did plan to start applying for jobs immediately and manage the process more effectively by being proactive and not waiting for companies to get back to him before applying for other positions.

At his second interview, towards the end of the final year, Darren's priorities had changed. He had applied for ten different jobs, but not progressed any further than the online testing stage. He found applying for jobs time-consuming with online applications taking up to two hours and about 45 minutes to tailor a CV and cover letter to a particular role. Darren had therefore decided to focus on his university work as he had a number of deadlines and wanted a break over the summer before applying again. He thought the process was hard as organisations do not provide feedback as to why applicants are unsuccessful. Darren felt one of the main reasons he was being rejected from the graduate schemes was his lack of work experience as he only had his part-time work at a newsagents on his CV. His main extracurricular activity was playing 5-a-side football for a local team, though, this was not on a regular basis. From his interviews it seems that Darren lacks the forms of cultural capital that graduate employers tend to recognise such as work experience and significant involvement in extracurricular activities.

Darren also exhibits a lack of social capital within the context of the graduate market to help him apply for jobs. Except for his older sister who is in her final year of training to be a nurse, no other members of his family have been to university. While his family are supportive he feels they do not properly understand the challenges he faces being at university. Darren does not have access either to a wider social network of friends and contacts who could provide advice and potential employment guidance. Support is available at university through the careers service, but he has not used them at all to date saying he wants to do everything for himself and succeed on his own merits. He has used the internet and online forums for guidance rather than seeking professional advice. However, when he is still without a graduate job twelve months after leaving university he does acknowledge that it might be a good idea to book an appointment with careers.

When he failed to secure a place on a graduate training scheme Darren broadened his applications for graduate-level jobs to include smaller organisations. He has also narrowed the geographical area that he is searching for work in as he decided he was closer to his family than he initially thought, and after the recent death of his grandma says he is not quite ready yet to move away for work. Darren is now applying to a less competitive sector of the field of graduate employment where organisations are only looking for one or two candidates at a time and will tend to attract local rather than national applications. Twelve months after graduation he has begun to demonstrate a degree of practical mastery of the application process. On a number of occasions he has successfully passed the first stages and been invited for interview, though he has not yet been offered a position.

Darren recognises his background as being working class, though, he said in his first interview that he thinks he has "a middle-class mentality." He wants to break from the experiences of his childhood where people are not career oriented and work for money so they can go to the pub at the weekend. Darren wants more from his life such as a

fulfilling job as well as an opportunity to travel and the security of a house and car. He sees middle-class people as having more opportunities. He believes he has changed while at university and even though he is not in a graduate job as yet it has been a worthwhile experience that has developed him as a person.

During his interviews Darren exhibits a low-level of ordinary reflection regarding his experiences of the transition from the field of education to the field of employment. He knows he should have been more proactive to gain relevant experience while at university and thinks he would have also benefited by moving away from home, but since he cannot go back he does not dwell upon the matter. He is struggling to assert his agency and achieve his expectations for a graduate job. While Darren reflects upon the actions he should have taken in the past he is not reflexive on how to change his future. He does not have a defined strategy on how to amend his approach to applications and interviews in order to improve his chances of success. He remains optimistic and continues to apply for graduate-level roles.

Darren appears to be between two worlds at the last interview. He wants to move forward in terms of employment, but is finding it difficult to leave his childhood life behind saying that he has not had the courage to leave home yet. This unwillingness to move is limiting his engagement with the field of graduate employment to the local area and is an indication of his habitus effecting his behaviour. He simultaneously feels tied to his home area while also wanting to break free to improve his employment opportunities. With no family history of higher education or graduate employment Darren not only lacks practical support, but he also realises that moving on will differentiate him from his family and friends.

Darren's habitus is revealed through his behaviours and relationship with the field of graduate employment. He values education, believing that it will improve his employment opportunities, but is experiencing difficulty negotiating his entry into the field. Darren has fairly low holdings of cultural and social capital in relation to the graduate job market and he is also constraining his opportunities by his unwillingness to move, almost appearing afraid to leave the familiarity of his home area. Due to a lack of economic capital he has to work two part-time jobs so with long working hours he has limited time to apply for jobs. Additionally, he did not take advantage of work experience and extracurricular opportunities while at university which could have helped him to position himself better within the field.

A failure to secure a graduate job is also an indication that his approach to the application process requires reviewing. However, rather than seeking professional help he continues on his own. Darren appears to lack symbolic mastery to help him objectively reflect upon his actions and alter his approach to the recruitment process. Through repeated applications he has gained experience of the process, eventually managing to progress through the different stages. Darren does appear to have been constrained by objective structures limiting his opportunities during childhood. However, he does want to improve his life and has made conscious decisions such as attending university and applying for higher-level jobs to improve his subjective situation. A week after our final interview Darren contacted me to say he had been

offered a graduate-level job as a marketing assistant. It has taken him eighteen months from his first graduate application to successfully securing a job.

### Interviewee 1 – Summary of field, capital and habitus

Field	<p>Little knowledge on the graduate application process at the start of the final year of study.</p> <p>Initially applied for large graduate schemes, but did not progress beyond the online testing stage.</p> <p>Applied for a range of jobs suitable for a Business Management graduate.</p> <p>Limited geographic mobility narrowing the field as wanted to stay local to home.</p> <p>Continued to apply for graduate-level roles at smaller organisations looking for a specific role to be filled.</p> <p>Due to difficulty accessing the field worked two part-time jobs.</p> <p>Did not seek professional advice at any point in the process, relied on online information and forums.</p> <p>Ten months after graduation secured his first graduate job as a marketing assistant in a medium-sized local organisation.</p>
Capital	<p>Low holdings of all forms of capital that are recognised by graduate employers – widening participation student.</p> <p>No family financial support so lived at home and kept his part-time job throughout university.</p> <p>No extracurricular activities to develop his cultural capital – 5 a-side football team on an irregular basis.</p> <p>Limited social capital as first generation of his family to attend university. His social capital is limited to his family and local community and he has no other networks or contacts he can access to open up job opportunities.</p> <p>Based on this he does not hold symbolic capital that is socially recognised.</p>
Habitus	<p>Experienced difficulty exerting his agency in the graduate labour market indicated through length of time to secure work.</p> <p>Appears to be subjectively constrained by a lack of opportunities in his upbringing. Caring responsibilities at home.</p>



	<p>Lived on a council estate. People not career oriented and worked to earn money then spent the weekend in the pub BUT he wants to break from this. Finding it hard to leave home, family and the area he is familiar with.</p> <p>His practice in relation to applications lacks reflection. He is repeatedly applying across a period of 18 months without seeking any professional advice. Eventually through changing the type of organisation applied for and self-developing his applications through trial and error he does begin to be more successful.</p> <p>Self-identifies as working class. Habitus appears to indicate poor positioning in relation to the graduate labour market. Personal circumstances appear to structure his opportunity and working two low skilled part-time jobs. Personal trajectory.</p> <p>Has the qualifications and the personal ability to work at a higher-level, but struggling to access the field. Except for his qualifications Darren does not present himself as a graduate with a range of life and work experience. Failed to access opportunities at university that would have positioned him more competitively in the field.</p>
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Interviewee 1 Darren. Employability based on CareerEdge model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007)

Career Development Learning- did not seek professional advice used online information and forums.

Experience (Work and Life) – limited work experience through part-time job in a local newsagents during university. Second job in a warehouse which is also low-skilled. Life experience – 5-a-side football.

Degree – achieved a 2.1 so eligible for graduate-level work. Only 96 UCAS points as attended a college which only offered a 12 unit Diploma rather than full 18 unit. Could limit him from some graduate schemes.

Generic Skills – has developed generic skills during his degree. Limited work experience means he cannot always provide work-based examples.

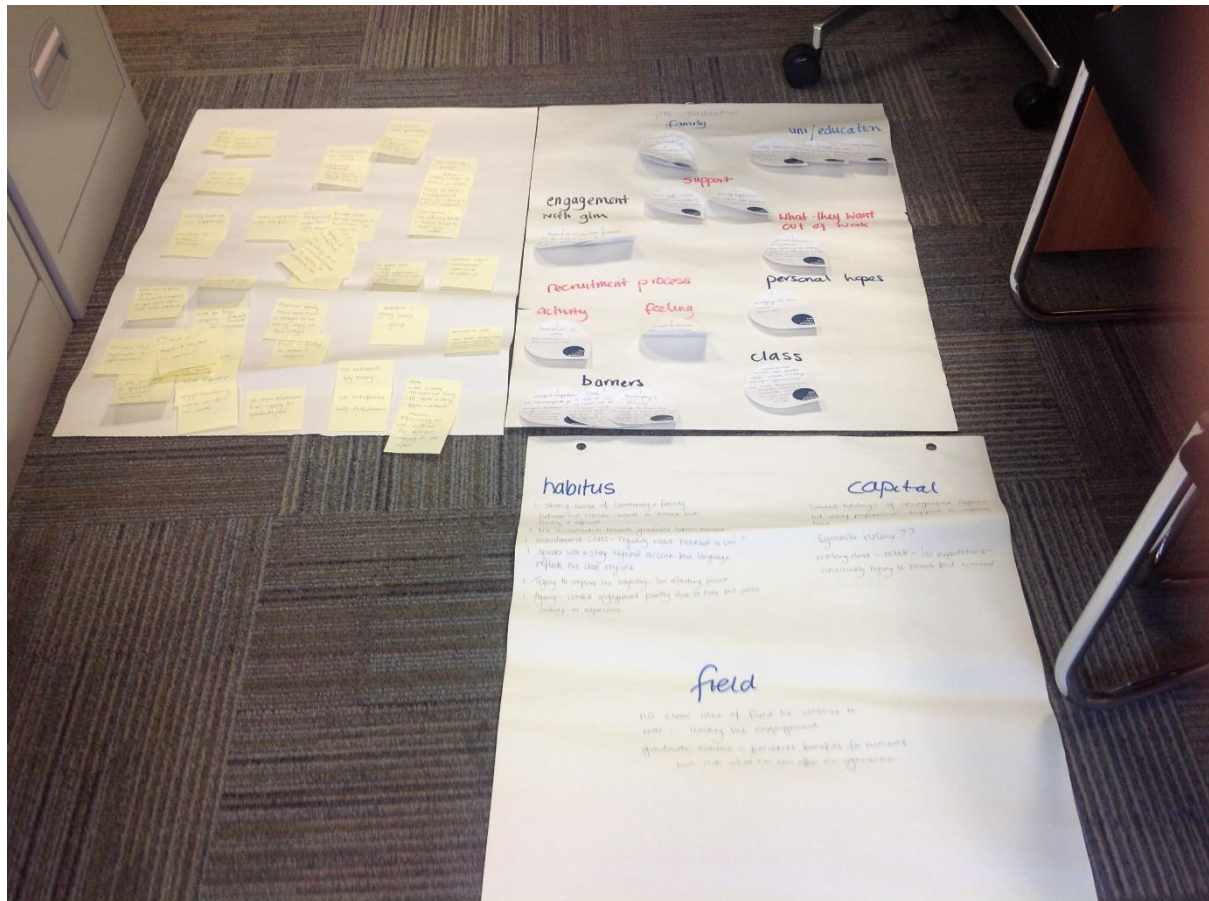
Emotional Intelligence – remains confident and positive and seems to be coping well with the length of time he has been applying for jobs.

Reflection and Evaluation – not a reflective person. Even though he has been rejected for 18 months does not appear to alter his approach to applications. Seems to be a process of trial and error and applying to a less competitive area of the field.

Self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy- presents himself as confident and having self-esteem despite the rejections. He has clearly had some difficult personal circumstances in his childhood and he repeatedly says you have to remain positive. Has approached the graduate application process on his own without professional help so could be considered as having self-efficacy, though, advice may have allowed him to secure a job more quickly.

Employability – Darren is employable in terms of his qualifications, general skills and outlook. However, his limited work and life experience appear to have impacted upon his employability. In addition, professional advice would have helped develop his career skills and understanding of the processes to engage with the field of graduate employment.

## Appendix I: Developing my Template



## **Appendix J: Final Version Template Analysis**

### **1. Understanding the Field**

1. Multiple fields depending on chosen industry sector
  1. No clear career plan multiple applications to keep options open
  2. Rejected by chosen field so require alternatives
2. Competitive graduate labour market
  1. Field difficult to access
  2. Graduate schemes high entry criteria
    1. UCAS points
    2. Previous work experience
    3. Depth and quality of responses on application form
  3. Start in low position in the field to gain knowledge and skills for progression
3. Knowledge of the field
  1. Specific to each sector
  2. Understanding of the field
    1. Limited
      1. Did not understand requirements of the role prior to interview
      2. Unaware of entry requirements
    2. Research prior to applying to target engagement with the process
    3. Volunteered in sector to gain relevant experience for entry
  3. Personal values in relation to the field
  4. Open-minded not focusing on a particular field due to lack of career plans
  5. Spoke to people already working in the sector for advice
  6. Long-term planning for progression in the field
  7. Knowledge required as to where jobs for the field are advertised
4. Entering a specific field provides clearer career path and progression
5. Positive view of graduate schemes
  1. Type of organisations and opportunities to progress
  2. Considered to be more stable in a changeable economic climate
  3. Recruit the cream off the top of the graduate pool
6. Employability module part of degree – management, history, sociology, textiles

### **2. Recruitment Processes**

1. Graduate Schemes
  1. Multi-staged process direct with organisation
2. Initial application
  1. Online
  2. Replication of CV information quick to complete
  3. Specific questions relating to the company more time consuming
  4. Factual questions
  5. Situational questions more challenging

3. Psychometric tests
  1. Wide variety – verbal, numerical, situational
  2. High failure rate at this stage of the process
  3. Numerical tests meant to be GCSE standard, but felt to be more difficult
  4. Block at passing this stage – 4 females
4. Telephone/ video interview
  1. Unnerving as not natural conversations
  2. Time lag while writing answers down
  3. Automatic recording of answers after providing thinking time
5. Face-to-face interview
  1. Opportunity to demonstrate abilities not afforded in previous stages
6. Assessment centre
  1. Other applicants more mature with previous work experience
  2. Unsure what to expect when attending first assessment centre
  3. Length of time – half a day up to two days
  4. Social aspects as well as a range of tasks
7. Feelings on the recruitment process for graduate schemes
  1. Annual process with long-time scale due to number of applications
  2. Organisations making early decisions in the cycle to recruit the best graduates
  3. Slow organisations potentially lose talent as applicants accept other positions
  4. Early closing dates during final year– not ready to engage
  5. Recruitment is a process to deal with volume of applications rather than matching people to a job
  6. Differences between each companies requirements and activities
2. Graduate employment – individual positions
  1. Recruitment agencies
    1. Persistent phone calls
    2. Poor matching of applicant's skills to positions
    3. Agency specialising in graduate's more focused approach
  2. Jobs advertised on websites
    1. Limited information on general websites
    2. Company websites more specific
    3. Need to keep track of applications so as not to confuse jobs applied for
  3. Shorter process so tend to respond more quickly than graduate schemes
  4. Industry specific graduate fairs
3. Returning to placement organisation
  1. Large organisation with graduate scheme
    1. Advanced entry in the recruitment process – varies by organisation
    2. Recommendations from manager on placement to support application
  2. Smaller organisations individual positions
    1. Kept in contact so aware when a job became available
      1. Invited to interview without needing to apply
    2. Offered position at end of placement
      1. Security during final year
      2. No need to engage with graduate applications – time saving

#### 4. Non-graduate employment

1. Large organisations
  1. Multi-staged
  2. Recruiting on a regular basis for non-graduate positions
2. Positions with immediate starts – applied later when available for work
3. Faster progression through the application process

#### 5. Feelings on graduate recruitment processes

1. Tough
2. Rigorous
3. Gruelling
4. Scared
5. Nervous
6. Disheartening when continuing to be unsuccessful
7. Rejection – mainly from graduate schemes
8. Uncertainty waiting to hear back from organisations
9. Long process from first applications to securing a position
10. Time consuming – time per application 45 minutes to 8 hours
  1. Students spending longer on applications more successful
  2. Wasted time if rejected at later stages
11. Unsure of timings for the graduate recruitment cycle across the final year
12. Lack of understanding the process led to errors
13. Confidence/ skills increased though volume of applications until secured job
14. Targeted applications from researching organisation/ job role more successful
15. Experience from applying from placements
16. Feel like a number rather than a person due to volume of applications
17. Process is a game – provide the answers organisations want to hear

### 3. **Engagement with Graduate Labour Market during the final year of study**

#### 1. Engaged

1. Point of engagement
  1. Early in the final year to apply for graduate schemes
  2. Three or four months prior to graduation for single jobs
  3. Engagement as course drawing to an end forcing decision
2. Graduate Careers Fairs
  1. Speak directly to organisations about opportunities
  2. Industry specific graduate fairs in certain sectors
3. Careers service for additional support
4. Focused students actively driving transition into employment
5. Where possible seek feedback from organisations to improve
6. Stopped applying when progressing with one company, but then rejected at end

#### 2. Not engaged

1. Lack of work experience
2. Focus on academic study and grades to maximise performance
3. No clear career plans preventing engagement
4. Already offered position by placement organisation
5. Part-time work and can fall back on this
6. Not required to work – Muslim female
7. Complete degree take a break then look for work

- 8. Lack of motivation to start applying – living at home
  - 9. Lack of knowledge of recruitment processes
  - 10. Towards end of year regret not engaging earlier
- 3. Non-graduate employment
    - 1. To gain work experience
    - 2. Increase hours in part-time job while looking for work
    - 3. Low expectations of success
  - 4. Further study at Masters level
    - 1. Requirement for progression in chosen field
    - 2. Option if do not gain employment – fall-back position
    - 3. Specialist knowledge to separate you from those holding Bachelors degree
    - 4. Postponing entry into the labour market
    - 5. Dependent on results for bursary

#### **4. Barriers to Graduate Employment**

- 1. Travel
  - 1. Cost of travel in comparison to income
  - 2. Public transport limiting commuting distance
- 2. Location
  - 1. Remaining at home geographically limits the number of jobs available
  - 2. Living at home while studying - feel they cannot live independently
  - 3. London considered to be too expensive and daunting
- 3. Economic capital
  - 1. Low holdings so unable to wait for the right job
  - 2. Cost of travelling to interview particularly if overnight stay
- 4. Family
  - 1. Expectations of suitable career
  - 2. Freedom to choose, but little constructive guidance
  - 3. Issues at home preventing full engagement
  - 4. Commitments limiting geographical search area
- 5. Final year of university
  - 1. Increased academic expectations and time to study
  - 2. Time management to handle multiple tasks – study, applications, part-time work
- 6. Field
  - 1. Limited knowledge of graduate employment and how to access the field
  - 2. Limitations in subject studied at university in comparison to the requirements
  - 3. Require additional qualifications before being able to enter
  - 4. Lack of feedback from interviews to modify behaviours
- 7. Barriers from college
  - 1. Regret choices at school/ college as long-term impact on employment
  - 2. Poor performance at A-level –low UCAS points for graduate schemes

8. Part-time work
  1. Impact on time to apply for jobs
  2. Fall-back position – additional time to look for graduate employment
  3. Low skilled work not CV enhancing
9. Weak CV – lack of work experience and involvement in recognised activities

## **5. Holdings of Capital in relation to the Graduate Labour Market**

1. Work experience outside the course
  1. Relevant to the graduate labour market
    1. Volunteered in sector to gain relevant experience led to paid employment
    2. Worked part-time in a number of fields with recognised transferable skills
  2. Not relevant to the graduate labour market
    1. Part-time job to earn money
    2. Low-skilled work difficulty transferring skills to graduate labour market
2. Placement year
  1. Level of work – higher so relevant to securing graduate role
  2. Structured development
  3. Developed network of contacts
  4. Placement instrumental to securing graduate employment
  5. Confident from previously being successful in securing work
3. Voluntary experience
  1. Extensive volunteering developing skills and network
  2. Volunteering at a level recognised by organisations
  3. Will need to volunteer after graduation as insufficient experience for the sector
  4. Unpaid voluntary placement as part of degree – history, sociology, care courses
4. Employability Skills
  1. Presentation skills
  2. Communication skills
    1. Writing
    2. Verbal
    3. Provide clear and concise information
  3. Work independently
  4. Emotional intelligence from dealing with a range of people
  5. Importance of soft skills
  6. Those with relevant experience feel more confident
5. Social Capital
  1. Importance of developing your network of contacts for opportunities
  2. Networking events arranged by large organisations during placement
  3. Parental contacts – not always relevant to their chosen field
  4. Extended family for advice
  5. Networking essential in creative industries
  6. Limited social capital affected ability to secure work experience



6. Economic Capital
  1. Living at home
    1. Not under financial pressure to secure immediate work
    2. Take time to choose jobs they are interested in
  2. Financially independent – need work immediately upon graduation
7. Cultural Capital
  1. Level of knowledge in relation to market variable
  2. CV's
    1. High-levels of experience and extracurricular
    2. Weak CV
    3. Poor A-level results insufficient UCAS points
  3. Observable disposition in relation to graduate labour market
    1. Confident
    2. Articulate skills and abilities
    3. Lack of confidence and nervous about the future

## **6. Expectations of Graduate Employment**

1. Graduate schemes
  1. Approximately two years
  2. Move between departments to develop knowledge
  3. Decide area to work in after entering the organisation
  4. Accessing management-level position immediately
  5. Geographically mobile
  6. Regarded favourably by employer due to their investment in your early career
2. Large organisations
  1. Career development opportunities
    1. Progression to senior levels in the hierarchy
    2. Move between departments
  2. Difficult for achievements to be recognised due to the number of staff
  3. Reputation of organisation source of esteem
3. Small organisations
  1. Variety of tasks within a role
  2. Contributions/ work can make a difference to the organisation
4. Expectations of the work itself
  1. Variety
  2. Challenging
  3. Enjoyment
  4. Job satisfaction
  5. Regular hours and working weekdays
5. Other expectations from graduate employment
  1. To feel valued by the organisation
  2. Good level of pay – financial security
  3. Job satisfaction more important than pay providing salary satisfactory
  4. Training
  5. Personal development

- 6. A position of responsibility
- 7. Long hours required to progress
- 8. Promotion

## **7. Education**

### **1. School**

#### **1. Negative**

- 1. Failing school placed in special measures
- 2. Disruption due to staff changes
- 3. Did not work hard at school- reflected in grades
- 4. Hated school
- 5. Not diagnosed with an additional learning need until university
- 6. Supported gifted and talented and those struggling – lost in the middle
- 7. Rough school which negatively impacted on learning

#### **2. Positive**

- 1. Friendly staff
- 2. Strict uniform policy
- 3. High standards of behaviour expected
- 4. Sense of belonging as predominantly same ethnic minority group
- 5. After school clubs available
- 6. Good school
- 7. Travelled to attend as a good school

### **2. College**

#### **1. Sixth-form attached to school**

- 1. Smaller
- 2. Same staff teaching as school
  - 1. Staff understood your capabilities
  - 2. Friendlier relationships as oldest pupils taught by staff
  - 3. Influenced A-level choice based on experience at GCSE
  - 4. Aware of, and supportive of, previous problems in school
- 3. Limited choice of subjects due to size
  - 1. Impacted later on degree choice
- 4. Person rather than a number
- 5. Remain with friendship group

#### **2. Sixth-form or college independent from school**

- 1. Larger
- 2. Wider range of subjects available
- 3. Greater ethnic mix
- 4. Friends
  - 1. Followed friends to same sixth-form
  - 2. Made new friends as chose an alternative college

### **3. Subjects studied**

#### **1. A-levels**

- 1. Considered to be more academic than BTEC
- 2. Challenging – step up from GCSEs
- 3. Choice based on achievement and subject studied at GCSE
- 4. Only interested in one subject – remainder to provide entry grades

#### **2. Foundation degree in art required to study creative subjects at university**

3. Regrets choice of subject at college
  1. Limited choice of degrees available
  2. Subjects did not meet expectations so struggled
4. College a stepping stone to university
5. Young to make decisions that impact on the rest of your life
6. Time to settle onto a new course – college only two years
4. Support at college/ sixth-form
  1. Expectation to continue to university
    1. UCAS application support
    2. Little information on alternatives to university
  2. Staff more supportive than school
    1. Particular encouragement from one tutor to continue to university
5. Career ambitions prior to university
  1. Fantasy type jobs in relation to current study – archaeologist, writer
  2. Jobs experience of in society – nursing, teaching
  3. None
  4. Considered realistically during final year
    1. Realised difficult to access certain fields
  5. No connection at college between choice of degree and employment
6. University
  1. First generation in family to attend
  2. Parents encouraging/ supportive
    1. Discussed with parents and visited together
    2. Organised university by self
  3. Study for a degree to improve employment opportunities
  4. Choice of degree subject
    1. Interested in subject
    2. Broad to keep options open
    3. Care leaver advised on vocational course to lead directly to employment
    4. Change degree subject if starting again
    5. Poor advice from college
  5. Location of university
    1. Near to live at home
    2. Move to university
      1. Distance considered
      2. Enjoy full university experience
      3. Family demands at home would affect study
  6. Worried about debt
  7. Meet new people who you would not have under any other circumstances
  8. Always intended to go to university straight after college
  9. Attended university as no other plans at 18
  10. Enjoyed experience – do not want to leave

## **8. Support at University**

1. Professional advice
  1. Careers service
    1. Variable levels of engagement
    2. Advice and guidance helpful when used
    3. Check application forms and CV – critique to focus on job
    4. Prefer closer contact in school similar to applying for placement
    5. Heard about service by word of mouth
    6. Only used after continuing to be unsuccessful
    7. Engagement positively impacted on employment success
  2. Online resources – websites and forums
  3. Recruitment agencies
    1. Helpful advice
    2. Pestering – mismatch skills to jobs available
2. Course Support
  1. Careers workshops as part of degree
  2. Inspired by talks from professionals in the field explaining their job role
  3. Tutors shared their knowledge of the field
  4. Talks from recent graduates in the field
  5. Discussed skills developed on the course and how they relate to employment
3. Family
  1. Parents without degrees do not understand the demands of the final year
    1. Hard studying and simultaneously applying for work
  2. Supportive, but not able to offer practical advice and guidance
  3. Parents do not understand field to appreciate opportunities and requirements
  4. Mothers more likely to be involved in providing support
  5. Parents no money so had to be financially independent
  6. Does not tell parents about applications to avoid being questioned
  7. Care leaver limited contact with family
4. Friends
  1. University friends supportive as understood the challenges
  2. Friends at home who did not attend university do not understand requirements
  3. Competition to secure work before each other
  4. Different employment plans so experience in the field is individual
5. Desire to secure employment independently to prove themselves

## **9. Involvement in Extracurricular Activities**

1. Volunteering
  1. Formal
    1. National charities
    2. Volunteering to gain experience within field for career
    3. Requirement for degree
    4. Enjoyment

2. Informal
  1. Local community group
  2. Local charities
  3. Linked to hobbies and personal interests
2. Sport
  1. Played informally with friends in local area
  2. After-school sports teams
    1. Variety of activities
    2. Withdrawn for poor behaviour
  3. Dancing – competed at national level
  4. Belonged to local teams/ clubs across a range of sports
3. Extracurricular activities in college
  1. Enrichment
    1. Compulsory
      1. Additional qualifications – IT, creative writing
      2. Additional skills
      3. Forced to undertake activities otherwise would not have participated
    2. Optional
      1. Non-participation as activities did not appeal
      2. Lack of time due to distance travelled to college
  2. Sports and clubs not part of the enrichment programme
4. Extracurricular activities at university
  1. Clubs and societies
    1. None appealed
    2. Ski Society
      1. Left due to cost
    3. Opportunity for new activities
  2. Student representative
  3. Focused on studies – involvement sacrifices time
  4. Living at home so continued previous activities
  5. Living at home so difficult to return for activities
5. Part-time work
  1. College
  2. University
6. Benefits of extracurricular activities
  1. New skills
  2. Enhance CV/ examples at interview
  3. Network of contacts

## **10. Personal hopes for the future**

1. Career
  1. Settled into a particular career
  2. Progression to management level
  3. High income
  4. Own business

2. Family
  1. Own their own property
  2. Financial stability
  3. Children
  4. Live near family
  5. Experiences over material possessions
  6. Travel

## 11. Habitus

1. Class
    1. Determinants of class
      1. Based on parent's position
      2. Improve their class position from parents
      3. Equalising process in society – harder to identify people's class
        1. Do not believe in the class structure
      4. Class should not define or limit your opportunities
    5. Employment
      1. Level of skill
      2. Differentiate office work (middle class) and manual work (working class)
  2. Economic capital
    1. Salary
    2. House
    3. Financial support available while at university
  3. Cultural capital
    1. Opportunities during childhood
    2. Linked to education
    3. One aware of new cultural classification
  4. Social capital
    1. Middle class bigger network of contacts
    2. Inspiration to progress
    3. Working class student struggled to mix with middle class
  5. Disposition
    1. Speech
    2. Dress
    3. Behaviour
- 
2. Working class
    1. Family
      1. Extended family nearby
      2. Influence of grandparents
      3. Mother single parent so other family members acted as father figures
      4. Caring responsibilities within the family
      5. Reluctance to relocate away from family
      6. Lack of role models in relation to graduate employment
    2. Upbringing
      1. Sense of community
      2. Sense of pride in working class origins
      3. Respect for money based on childhood experiences

- 4. Maintain working class value of hard work to acquire possessions
  - 5. Feels looked down on at times
- 3. Left behind friends at home due to university experience
  - 1. Dead end jobs
  - 2. Drinking/ socialising at the weekend
  - 3. Stuck in a rut
  - 4. Friends make fun of success
  - 5. No longer feel they belong to social group – outsider looking in
  - 6. Feel in a better position than friends due to university experience
- 4. Hopes from attending university in relation to class
  - 1. University has been a life changing experience
  - 2. Better self in comparison to the area brought up in
  - 3. Move to a better area
- 3. Middle class
  - 1. Parents in “good jobs”
  - 2. Value experiences during their childhood
  - 3. Participated in activities and opportunities associated with money
  - 4. Parents originally working class, but changed due to their work
  - 5. Financial support
    - 1. Take longer time to choose field for graduate employment
    - 2. Looking for employment, but no sense of urgency
    - 3. Would like an income, but do not need to be financially independent
- 2. Gender
  - 1. Attitudes in relation to the workplace
    - 1. Perception that women are not treated equally
    - 2. Females believe they will be successful in their careers
    - 3. Noted gendered industries when applying for jobs
      - 1. Placement in IT and automotive industry – male dominated
      - 2. Placement in fashion and care industry – female dominated
    - 4. Female students lacked confidence in relation to males
    - 5. Female students lack of female role models
  - 2. Gendered expectations in ethnic minority families
    - 1. Different family roles for males and females
    - 2. Males and females have different limitations placed upon them
  - 3. Children
    - 1. Females foresee children in their future more than males
    - 2. Females expect to work part-time in the future to accommodate family
  - 4. Mature students
    - 1. Left school with no qualifications
      - 1. Messed around at school
      - 2. Did not like school
      - 3. Low skilled work no opportunity for progression
    - 2. Mothers
      - 1. Act as role model for their children
      - 2. Improved employment to support family
      - 3. Time to study as not working full-time
      - 4. Looking for employment to fit with family commitments

3. Ethnicity – respondents from different ethnic groups
  1. Influence of parents
    - 1, Education
      1. Lack of education in own country so keen for children to study
      2. Moved to UK to improve children's opportunities
      3. Expected to continue onto higher education
      4. Specific degree subjects favoured by parents
      5. Afraid of upsetting parents by poor academic performance
      6. Parents check completing university work
      7. Children's achievement reflect back on parents
      8. Lack of understanding and tolerance of different cultures by fellow pupils
      9. Specific career routes favoured for males
    2. Behaviours
      1. Maintain cultural traditions
      2. Older siblings act as role models for younger family members
      3. Expected behaviours related to gender
      4. Strict parents – modified behaviours to meet their expectations
    3. Expectations of marriage
      1. Muslim respondents expected to marry within 2-3 years
        1. Parental influence on choice
        2. Own choice
        3. Arranged if not met anyone
      4. Males income to support wife and family
      5. Females employment with income for self or household extras
        1. Move to live near husband's family
        2. Not under pressure to secure high-level work
        3. Work for financial independence
  2. Influence of extended family
    1. Older siblings experiences of recruitment processes
    2. Members of extended family act as role models due to their achievement
    3. Competition amongst parent's generation as child's success important to impress others
    4. Interference and questioning from extended family
    5. Spend time with extended family on a weekly basis
3. Cultural heritage and practice
  1. Identity
    1. Hybrid
      1. Maintain values and practice from parent's country of origin
      2. Identify with family living in country of origin
      3. Bilingual – possible advancement in the workplace
      4. Demonstrate to employers' awareness of British culture and values
      5. Practice norms and values of British society since born in this country
      6. Values of ethnic heritage may differ so combine with British values
  2. Cultural practice
    1. Parent's desire to maintain traditions and cultural values
    2. Active engagement with religion by Muslim students



4. Ethnicity – White respondents
  1. Hesitancy in answering question
  2. Listen to parents, but make own decisions
  3. Freedom to choose own future
  4. Full university experience so moved away from home
  5. Member of evangelical Christian movement until 18
    1. Taught no limitations on personal achievement
    2. Proactive support for those in need

## **12. One year after graduation**

1. Labour market experiences post-graduation
  1. Employment outcomes
    1. Ten graduate jobs
      1. Two graduate schemes
      2. Eight Individual jobs
      3. Five returned to placement organisation
    2. Eleven non-graduate jobs
      1. Four continuing to work in previous jobs from university
      2. Two temporary contracts
      3. Two with two part-time jobs
      4. Low capital holdings so gaining additional experience before applying
      5. Working reduces time to apply for other positions
    3. Three Masters-level study
      1. One chosen strategically as specific masters required for chosen role
      2. Two taking Masters as had not secured employment
    4. Seven outcomes unknown
  2. Capital holdings
    1. Level of capital holdings linked to length of time to secure work
    2. Insufficient experience so rejected from field
    3. Those with capital holdings secured work quickly once time to focus
  3. Break after graduation before applying
    1. Living at home so no financial pressure
    2. Focus on Ramadan
    3. Time to choose a career that meets expectations
2. Job meeting expectations
  1. Worked at company on placement so understood expectations
  2. Did not fully understand the requirements of the job until working
  3. Cultural mismatch – Muslim female
  4. Shock of corporate culture and expected behaviours
  5. Demanding working full-time
  6. Harder than expected
  7. Work-life balance
    1. Having a balance important
    2. Career focused so work extra to progress
    3. More personal time without university work to complete
  8. Lower skilled work so not feeling fulfilled
  9. Not using creative skills as hoped

3. Graduate employment
  1. Work challenging and progressive
  2. Opportunities for training and development
  3. Consciously raising their profile in the business
  4. Negative attitudes of existing staff towards graduates as managers on schemes
  5. Small organisation with limited opportunity for progression
4. Non-graduate employment
  1. Struggled to secure graduate work so applied for non-graduate
  2. Rate of applications for graduate jobs slowed down
  3. Shift work and unsociable hours
  4. Routine work
  5. Lose out at interview to applicants with more experience
  6. Sense of failure
5. Experience of class in the workplace
  1. Linked to industry
    1. High skilled work only employ graduates
    2. Middle-class employees through qualifications and knowledge
    3. Split where there are different levels of skill in organisation
  2. Hierarchical
    1. Class observed within organisational structure
    2. Called by first name regardless of level
  3. Expect to change class from working to middle through job
  4. Maintain working-class values
  5. Class more noticeable upon moving further south
6. Experiences of gender in the workplace
  1. Gender divisions
    1. Horizontal
      1. Male and female dominated departments/ industries
      2. Did not expect to observe gendered departmental differences
      3. Gender challenges if working in department dominated by the opposite one
    2. Vertical
      1. Senior management predominantly male
      2. Initiatives for women into leadership
  3. Sense organisations recruit on ability not gender – reasons for divisions
  4. Working part-time limits career opportunities
  5. Challenge of managing older male colleagues
7. Experiences of ethnicity in the workplace
  1. Mix of diversity varied by organisation – reflection of local community
  2. Recruitment based on ability
  3. Attitudes amongst staff can vary depending on ethnicity
8. Capital
  1. Social capital
    1. Internal networking important
    2. Time to build working relationships
    3. Contacts crucial in creative industries

2. Cultural capital
  1. Experience and knowledge to move within the organisation
  2. Different degree would have provided different employment opportunities
  3. Insufficient capital for the field
3. Economic capital
  1. Lower skilled work due to immediate need for money
  2. Living at home so not under financial pressure
9. Skills used from university
  1. Research skills
  2. Organisation skills
  3. Problem solving
  4. Interpersonal skills
  5. Time management
  6. Team work
  7. Managing self in the workplace

## **Appendix K: Data Analysis Audit Trail**

I have based my audit trail on Halpern's (1983 cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) recommendations as it records my actions from the design of my study, through data gathering and analysis to presenting my findings.

### **1. Raw Data**

I gathered my raw data through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide (King & Horrocks, 2010). Each interview was recorded to allow me to focus on the questions and maintain a conversational approach as recommended by Kvale (2007). After each interview I made notes to record any issues, attitudes or behaviours that may be relevant later in my analysis. During the interviews I felt humbled at the level of personal detail shared by the respondents. We discussed difficult aspects from their childhood, their feelings about the leaving university and their hopes and ambitions for the future. It is through their generosity of providing this data that I managed to achieve rich, thick descriptions in my data analysis.

Following Silverman's (2013) advice I transcribed each interview myself. I felt this brought me close to my respondents as the transcription process recreated the interview setting within my mind and helped me to visualise the interview. Transcribing the data myself also allowed me to add nuances into the interview script such as long pauses, changes in tone of voice and emotions such as laughter or anxiety.

As my research is a longitudinal study I conducted up to three interviews with respondents. Prior to a follow-up interview I re-read the transcripts from earlier ones to remind me of our discussion and also to personalise subsequent interviews. For example, if I felt we had not fully explored a particular area I was able to return to the topic. In addition to the general themes of the second and third interview I was able to ask follow-up questions that related to individual student circumstances. Approaching the follow-up interviews in this way was also an early, informal stage of data analysis as I was beginning to interpret meaning and understanding of my respondents experiences which subsequently informed my follow-up interviews.

Across the time period for the interviews I built up a rapport and trust with the students and at times it felt I was becoming a careers counsellor, particularly for the Business Management students who I had known for several years. Several students asked my

advice while looking for jobs and continued to email me after graduation. One respondent came to see me about 18 months after finishing his degree as he wanted my opinion on changing his job.

## 2. Data Reduction and Analysis Products

With 31 respondents and multiple interviews my transcripts provided a significant amount of data with varying degrees of relevance depending upon the conversation. The first stage of my data analysis was therefore to reduce the volume of data to an initial interview summary noting relevant data from each interview. An example for my first interview is shown in Appendix G. The a priori thematic codes were drawn from the interview guide and further themes that I felt were relevant from my reading of the transcripts were added. I noted respondents' words quoted directly from the transcripts in red to avoid confusion at later stages.

I decided that the next stage of my data analysis was to write up the initial interview summary into a fuller discussion one as shown in Appendix H. This step allowed me to develop the thick, rich descriptions that I felt brought me close to the respondents' points of view (Becker, 1996) as I had to read my notes, and where necessary returned to the transcripts, to construct each summary. I wanted my data to be a representation of people's experiences so was conscious of carefully interpreting them using Bourdieu's (1977) concepts as my analytical framework. This stage was extremely time consuming, but I felt it was invaluable at the later stages of data analysis as it helped me to understand much more deeply my respondents lives so that I could begin to interpret my data to develop a coherent analysis.

## 3. Data Reconstruction and Synthesis Products

The first two stages of data analysis discussed in the previous section allowed me to summarise and organise my data ready for a full analysis. I was interested in analysing the students' experiences as narratives and read texts by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) and Riessman (2008) on this method. However, due to the high volume of data this technique was not possible. Additionally, my interviews were semi-structured using an interview guide and I had not focused on the nature of the story at the time to be able to use narrative analysis.

I therefore decided to use King and Brooks' (2017) Template Analysis to fully analyse my data. I had used a previous version of the technique in a masters' dissertation. Following King and Brooks' guidelines I firstly went through all my data noting down any relevant points on post-it notes as shown in Appendix I. Post-it notes were an important part of the process as I could move these around into clusters to develop my themes. On the post-its I recorded the interviewee number and page so that I could retrace my steps if required. When points were repeated I noted the additional respondents' details to indicate how frequently the theme occurred in the data. Post-it notes also allowed me to develop sub-themes to encourage deeper coding.

King and Brooks recommend the initial template is formed from a sample of transcripts as it then makes it easier to add further codes when analysing the remainder of the data set. I based my initial coding on data from interviewees 1, 9, 14, 15, 19 as I felt they represented a range of backgrounds to allow the initial template to be as detailed as possible. I then analysed the remaining transcripts adding in further codes and levels as required. Due to the volume of data I had two versions of my template before producing my final template in Appendix J.

Higher-order codes within my template included field, capital and habitus to ensure I analysed Bourdieu's (1977) key concepts. The remaining higher-order codes were developed from the aim of my thesis to address my research questions presented in Chapter One. During my data analysis I rearranged the sequence of the higher-order codes as I felt initially they did not flow. Where as in the final template I felt the themes flowed from one to another allowing an understanding of the field before analysing capital holdings and field. This followed Grenfell's (2012) recommendations of understanding the wider picture before focusing on individual agent's situations.

Lower-order codes were then nested in as sub-themes adding richness and depth to the data. While the final template is long it was important to capture the detail to be able to write up my three data analysis chapters. It was from the template and noticing patterns of behaviour that I identified three groups of students to inform my choice of chapters. These were: "Fish out of Water" who did not engage with the graduate labour market; "Between Two Worlds" who did engage, but did not secure graduate-level work and "The Game Players" who engaged and did secure graduate-level work. Within each chapter I then identified three clusters of behaviour to allow deeper

analysis and connections between Bourdieu's concepts and my data. I allowed these groupings to emerge from my data analysis as at the start of the process I could not see any specific patterns. However, through the detailed interview summaries and the construction of my template the clusters began to form until the respondents to be included in each chapter were clear.

Using my summaries and template I then wrote the three data analysis chapters in the order they are presented in the thesis. The chapters represent my interpretation of the data. Prior to writing each data analysis chapter I read the stories for each of the respondents classified as belonging to that chapter. This also included the summaries of their capital holdings, their understanding of the field and my thoughts on their habitus. As I was reading I noted key points which I then cross-referenced with the completed template to form my themes for that chapter.

I was conscious throughout to integrate Bourdieu's (1977) concepts and references from my literature review so that relationships could be seen between my analysis and extant literature. My findings also included my thoughts and interpretation of the data. Within my research I wanted the students' voices to be heard so I supported my analysis with quotes and using their words to make key points. The quotes also added to the richness and depth of the analysis. I believe that through my data analysis I have represented the respondents' experiences and have demonstrated the complexity of outcomes upon graduation.

#### 4. Process Notes

Chapter Four discusses the methodological approach in my study. Establishing this was complex and at times I felt confused on my ontological and epistemological position. I knew I was a qualitative researcher as I wanted to use language to generate understanding of my respondent's lived experiences (Bryman, 2008) as it is through people that we can interpret meaning. Having read a number of texts I adopted a relativist ontology following King and Horrocks (2010, p9) definition that "our understanding and experiences are relative to our specific cultural and social frames of reference, being open to a range of interpretations." I felt this encapsulated the breadth of my respondents' experiences as I believe everyone interprets meaning based on their own cultural and social backgrounds.

Similarly with my epistemological position I read widely to understand my position. Initially I felt I was a constructionist where meaning is subjective and created in the mind to make sense of experiences. In the literature the terms constructionist and constructivist are often used interchangeably which further added to my deliberations. It was only after reading Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work on naturalistic inquiry that I realised I was a constructivist as I believed experiences are individualistic with multiple meanings being possible for the same phenomenon. Constructivism allowed me to work within the interpretivist paradigm I was using within my study. Additionally, I felt it allowed me to become close to my data and interpret each interview as valid and trustworthy since it was based on their understanding of their experience.

Being constructivist meant my methodology was compatible with Bourdieu's position of structural constructivism (Fowler, 1997) where objective structures that determine practice have to be exposed and the subjective impact upon an individual analysed in order to fully understand social relations. Understanding is gained through two epistemological breaks (Robbins, 2012) which I found difficult to achieve in my research. The first break requires researchers to break from their preconceptions. I found that working in higher education for over twenty years I had begun to espouse the government's perspective that a degree is a route to employment and forgetting the wider role of a university education. During my analysis I often became judgemental and had to consciously acknowledge that a graduate job was not the only successful outcome from gaining a degree. The second break requires the researcher to be reflexive on their impact upon the process. Appendix A is a reflexive account of my personal background and it was from writing this I appreciated how this had effected my preconceptions. Attending university had led to what I believe is a successful career and my change of class from working to middle. My reflexive account did remind me that I had originally attended university to gain knowledge. I did not make the connection with work until my final year of study when I had to begin my transition into the workplace. This realisation helped me widen my view that students have the right to pursue their own path after university which may not be a graduate job.

As constructivist research I believe the data is trustworthy as I acknowledge that multiple realities can exist based on an individual's understanding of their experience.



Every interview was transcribed verbatim to capture detailed responses to my questions. Using Template Analysis also allowed me to analyse all the original transcripts so no pertinent points were overlooked. I constructed three versions of my template. The first one contained the analysis for five transcripts, the second one included the data from all respondents while the final version, included in Appendix J, tidied the template so that all the codes and themes were correctly presented. For example, when writing my analysis for “Fish out of Water” I realised that barriers to graduate employment impacted on the field and capital holdings. I therefore brought this theme forward in the template from point six to point four so that it could straddle across the two analysis sections of field and capital.

## 5. Materials relating to intention and disposition

The first stage of my study was to submit my PhD research proposal for ethical approval from the relevant school’s ethics committee. Alongside the proposal I had to submit an interview guide, an interviewee information sheet, an interviewee consent form and a risk analysis. Copies of these documents are included in my Appendices B-E. Once ethical approval had been gained I was able to commence my PhD.

I was motivated to undertake my study as working in the higher education sector for over twenty years had led me to question why students achieved such different outcomes upon graduation both in terms of grades and employment. Additionally, as a course leader the concept of employability was being introduced into the curriculum and I wanted to gain a deeper understanding to write a research-informed module to help my students develop their employability.

To understand my role in the research and the influence of my beliefs upon the study, early-on I wrote a reflexive account of my personal background which is in Appendix A. It was from this account that I realised that from working in the sector I had begun to follow the government rhetoric and view a degree as a route to a good job. By reconnecting with my own personal reasons for attending university, which was the pursuit of knowledge, I was able to broaden my perspective on respondent’s outcomes upon graduation. This allowed me to recognise that everyone is an individual and success can not solely be measured through work.

Before completing my study I expected all final year students would be applying for graduate employment. Through my research I have realised that every student is influenced by their own personal circumstances. Securing graduate employment should therefore not be considered as the only successful outcome after a degree with the value of education being recognised in its own right. I also now realise that universities need to provide more tailored support as the graduate labour market is a series of complex field with specialist knowledge on entry and progression being required.

## 6. Instrument Development Information

For my semi-structured interviews I developed an interview guide (Appendix B). The guide identified themes rather than a specific series of questions to be discussed with respondents. I used this approach as it provided guidance to keep the interview on track, but also allowed me the flexibility to explore areas of interest. For subsequent interviews I revisited the first transcripts to identify areas to discuss in the interview while also having a series of themes to be used across all the interviews.

The schedule for my interviews was the first one at the beginning of the final year, the second one in February to March and the final one nine months after graduation. Due to difficulties in recruiting non-Business Management students I had to conflate interview one and two for this group ensuring themes from both interviews were addressed.